





Vol 3 Don't Tell Me This Is the True History of the Three Kingdoms!

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Translated by [asd398](#)

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Chapter 1: Don't tell me this is before the strike on Yuan Shu

EDIT: Some errors in the number of troops for Yuan Shu.

“Yuan Shu declared herself Emperor?!”

“Un, Yuan Shu got hold of the Imperial Jade Seal.” Today, Meng De had summoned me to tell me this.

(TL: A reminder that Yuan Shu is Yuan Shao's loli little sister.)

Though I'd known that this event was bound to happen about now, I was still surprised. After all—

“But wasn't the Jade Seal... With uncle Sun Jian?”

Could it be that as expected...

“Un? Xuan De, you don't know yet right?” Meng De began to explain on seeing my reaction. “When Sun Jian passed through Liu Biao's territory while carrying the Jade Seal, he was ambushed By Huang Zu.”

“... Hai! Why didn't he listen to what I told him then?!” I exclaimed in frustrated. If only I had been more adamant back then.

“Thereafter, his subordinates— Cheng Pu and Han Dang, brought the Jade Seal back and his eldest daughter Sun Ce inherited his position. But because they do not have enough power, she exchanged the Jade Seal for 3,000 troops so that she can suppress the other feudal lords in Jiangdong.”

(TL: This is rather accurate. And 3,000 goes to show how desperate Sun Ce was.)

“ ... ”

“Un? Xuan De, what's wrong?”

Though I'd known that Sun Jian was destined to meet his end at this time, to have the daughter complex Sun Jian suddenly die like that... I can't quite accept the demise of my former comrade so easily.

Leaving aside my feelings, I wonder how sad it must be for his daughters?

“No, I just feel that it’s a pity.” I replied after thinking it over. “Uncle Sun Jian isn’t very old, and now he’s gone.”

“Un, I think that he is one of the rare people with true loyalty to the Han, but at the tender age of 30-odd...” Meng De sighed as she said so. “But we can take comfort in the fact that his daughter has taken revenge for him already.”

“Maa, that certainly is good.”

Sun Ce huh, I want to see what she’s like.

“Back to the problem of Yuan Shu declaring herself as Emperor. I am actually very concerned about this problem.” Meng De said with a serious look as she folded her hands together.

“Un, the Jade Seal that is the national symbol is with her after all.”

“Right, that’s the crux of the issue.” Meng De nodded.

“It was fine while it was in Sun Jian’s hands as he is a loyal feudal lord after all but now that it’s with Yuan Shu, things can only become as comedic as they are now.” Meng De said with an emphasis on ‘comedic’.

Indeed, it’s as Meng De said, any feudal lord in possession of the Jade Seal would eventually declare themselves to be the legitimate Emperor.

And not that the Jade Seal is with Yuan Shu, she won’t be herself if she doesn’t do it.

But the Han was now in a somewhat stable position, and Yuan Shu’s forces are not the most formidable nor does she have the support of the people. Even though she had neither popularity nor power, even though the political landscape was not favourable for her, she still had the audacity to declare herself Emperor. This is truly a comedy.

“And you summoned me to...”

“Un, let me be frank. Dealing with Ben Chu alone is more than enough to cause me a headache and I don’t know when she will attack. With my forces as they are now, I cannot face her head on and can only fortify my positions here.” It’s rare to hear Meng De say that she’s in a difficult position. “So this time I want to

ask you for help.”

(TL: In the original, it was Liu Bei who seized the opportunity and proposed to go instead as he wanted to escape Cao Cao’s confinement.)

“... Help with Yuan Shu, is it?” I asked.

Meng De nodded, and took out the map from behind her. “Yuan Shu is now based around the Shouchun and Wan areas in Huainan, so Xuan De, go and attack Wan city which is slightly nearer.”

Meng De pointed at the corresponding points on the map as she gave these instructions. But from this map, the Central Plains really is small huh. I didn’t think that it would require so much effort just to conquer a county city.

“Un, then for troops I’ll be using the few hundred I started out with.”

“Xuan De, I would be pretty embarrassed to say that I only have just a few hundred men after fighting battles all over the country.” Meng De said with a saddened expression as she came over and patted my shoulder.

Damn it! Just because I haven’t been recruiting huh~~

“You bring what troops you have and I’ll give you another 3,000.” Meng De said as she walked to her desk and began writing the official documents. “It’s been 3 days since Yuan Shu has declared herself Emperor, I don’t think...”

“Imperial Chancellor, I heard that Yuan Shu has lost Wan city.” Just then, Dian Wei came barging in and said so with a delighted look.

Lost Wan city? It’s only been 3 days!

“Ah? Lost Wan city?” Not just me, Meng De was suspicious about this victory report. “Dian Wei, are you certain that this is not false information? Or could this be some weird scheme by Yuan Shu to misdirect us?”

“Umm, I don’t think so.” Dian Wei backed up a bit as she was a little overwhelmed by Meng De’s pressure. “Sun Ce was the one who attacked Wan city, and Xiahou Yuan, who we sent earlier, assisted her, so the report is definitely accurate.”

“I only gave Xiahou Yuan 10,000 troops, how could she have conquered Wan city completely?”

Then why were you expecting me to do so with just 3,000 huh~~~

(TL: Here's a wooden sword, now go defeat that tank.)

"So it's Sun Ce huh... As expected, it was a matter of time before she avenged her father huh. Not only that, she was able to take Wan city, which is a strategically important point." Meng De nodded, seems like she's satisfied at the result. "Well then, no matter what, Yuan Shu's forces should have been significantly weakened now."

"Then does that mean I don't need to go to Wan city anymore?"

Though we're basically sitting around doing nothing in Xuchang, going into battle is not something I look forward to very much as I don't like making everyone suffer from fatigue from fighting.

"Ah, that's right." As she said so, she raised her brush and wrote another document. "I'll give you another 7,000, so the total you have is 10,000, for you to go attack Shouchun."

"... Why do I still have to go." I grumbled softly as I tried to grasp around the concept of 10,000 troops. "But 10,000 huh... I'm not sure I'm able to effectively command them all."

I'm not Han Xin. Just bringing more troops won't mean anything if I can't use them effectively.

(TL: Han Xin was a brilliant strategist that served Liu Bang.)

"Everyone has to start off somewhere, nobody started off with leading tens of thousands of troops." Meng De said as she looked at me, probably thinking back to when she first commanded an army. "And you have very good subordinates under you who you can share the responsibility with."

I'm really sorry for not improving at all even though we raised armies at about the same time.

(TL: Not sure what he's blaming himself for. Cao Cao served as an officer for years in the army before this.)

"Maa, I'll do my best."

Now that it has come to this point, how can I not agree.

“Ah. By the way, Yuan Shu herself is in Shouchun along with her self-professed 200,000 strong army.” Meng De said nonchalantly and relaxedly. “Maa, all this isn’t important anyway.”

“How is it not important!”

“Un? Why are you so agitated for?”

How can I not be agitated?!

“200,000? I only have 10,000 and I’ll probably have to lay siege on her city, how am I going to outlast her in a battle of attrition!”

(TL: Here’s a rifle, now go defeat that fighter jet.)

“Honestly, that 200,000 figure is definitely fake, and all she’s done is just put up more flags . Don’t mind it too much.” Meng De said with a wry smile. “The actual number should be just 20 or 30,000. Moreover, with Yuan Shu’s personality, she will definitely not stay put when you launch an offensive, and will definitely meet you in battle outside the city.”

“Haa...”

I was still a bit worried that Meng De’s confidence was misplaced but seems like her conviction behind her decision was born from a thorough analysis of Yuan Shu.

“And you might come face to face with Sun Ce as well. When the time comes, don’t forget to forge a good relationship with her. That will go a long way in resolving the issue of which city goes to whom.”

“Even if Meng De doesn’t tell me to, I know what to do, though I won’t do it especially for the sake of dividing territories.”

Speaking of which, why does it seem like I’m Meng De’s subordinate?

“Un, that’s all then. After you have done your preparations, you may set off for Shouchun. I’ll take care of the matter of reporting to Emperor Xian of Han. In any case, the matter of Yuan Shu cannot be left for too long and should be addressed immediately if possible.” Meng De sank into a chair as she finished. “Apologies, allow me to have a nap.”

Meng De does seem tired, and it’s not just today either.

“Lord Liu Bei, let’s leave.” Dian Wei lightly pulled my sleeve as she said so.

“Un.”

Meng De really needs a good rest.

After we left the room, Dian Wei gave a long exhalation all of a sudden.

“Un? What’s wrong, General Dian Wei?”

“No, nothing much.” Dian Wei said as she waved her hands. “I just feel that my lord always pushes herself too much, but she never relies on us whenever she makes a decision.”

“...”

“Of course, it’s not like I have a problem with that since my lord’s decisions have always been correct. It’s just that...” Dian Wei paused, as though she wasn’t sure how to put her thoughts into words. “My lord’s way of thinking is a little hard to understand sometimes.”

As expected, Meng De’s father was spot on with his judgement of her. Meng De is very unwilling to expose her thoughts to others.

—- I don’t trust anyone.

Perhaps this is the best portrayal for Meng De’s heart of hearts.

“Then General Dian Wei, do you trust Meng De?”

“I do!”

Unlike before, this line came out without hesitation from the pint-sized Dian Wei.

“Then don’t think too much about it. I’m not too clear about how Meng De thinks myself but she’s Meng De so it’ll be alright.”

‘Meng De’, just hearing her name is enough to inspire confidence.

“... That’s right, I think so too.” Dian Wei said after thinking for a while and then smiled. Looks like she’s pleased with her lord. “Well then Lord Liu Bei, I have something to attend to so I’ll be off now.”

“Un.”

Meng De really has some good companions too huh.

Oh right!

“General Dian Wei!”

“Un?”

I hesitated for a moment, or perhaps I have always been hesitating, as I don't know if zi should talk about this matter. But in the end, I feel that it is better to do so. “It's just a feeling of mine... But I think Meng De should be extra careful these days.”

“What could...” Dian Wei did not pay much heed to what I said until she detected my seriousness from looking at me. “Un, I will take note of it.”

“Yo, my lord, you're back, what did Lord Cao Cao summon you for?”

After returning to the inn, I found only Zhang Liao and the Xu state 3.

“Ah, looks like we'll be heading for Shouchun soon, and this time, it will be a real battle.” I sat on the wooden bed, tired out after walking all day, and lay down. “Speaking of which, why is just you 4? Where are the rest?”

“The rest went to ride horses. My back has been hurting these few days so I didn't go.” Zhang Liao gave a bitter smile as she rubbed her back. “But Shouchun huh~~ Seems like Yuan Shu over there declared herself Emperor.”

“Un, that's right. That rich second young miss actually did that in a time like this.” I said as I waved my hand, and looked at the Xu state 3. “Then what about you 3?”

“We.” “Are.” “Administrative officials.”

“Un, good excuse.” Maa, since they actually are doing administrative work, then it can't be helped.

“By the way, my lord, you have been lying down on my thighs.”

“– Waa! I'm sorry, I'm getting up now!”

“No, you can just stay as you are.” After hearing Gong You say so, I finally realised that the sensation my head felt when I lay down was much softer than usual.

“Hai, Gong You is still the best at calculations huh.” “I always though Xuan De would lie on my side.”

For some reason, Zi Hong and xiao Yong started saying some inexplicable words.

“Alright, though I didn’t participate, I’m still the judge. When the others come back, I’ll be in charge of announcing the results.” Zhang Liao said as she took out a small notebook and started writing in it. “The ones who guessed right were Yi De and my lord (Feng Xian), okay. The rest will have to treat them dinner.”

“... What are you all up to?” I couldn’t help but ask.

“No.” “We’re not up to much.” “Just betting on the position Xuan De would lie down on.”

... Are you all that bored? Can you all don’t use me as a racing horse or slot machine? How about playing something more healthy, like dice.

Un?

From my vantage point, I could clearly see a slip of paper being slipped through the crack under the door.

“This is...” I got up and walked to the door and picked up the slip of paper, and opened it up—

—- It happens next week.

“ ... ”

Though I have no proof of it, I’m very sure that State Uncle wrote this.

“My lord, what is the matter?”

“Ah, no, it’s nothing.”

Yuan Shu declared herself Emperor and this side is moving as well.

Waves of uneasiness swirled in my heart as I realised I was faced with the relentless march of history.

Chapter 2: Don't tell me this is a misunderstanding (1)

TL: In case you haven't noticed, Gong You or Sun Qian has quite a lot of screentime. The author liked her so much, he wrote a parallel character good ending route for her, thinking of translating that on weekends while I do the main story on weekdays.

Even though it was a slow march, the marching footfalls from both troops and horses was thunderous. Just a while ago, I was only a general (not really) bringing several hundred troops around the country, and now all of a sudden I am leading a 10,000 strong army as the Governor of Yu state.

(TL: Literally all thanks to Meng De...)

First was entering Xuchang, then it was the edict in the sleeve, and now I am on my way to launch an offensive on Yuan Shu who declared herself Emperor. Honestly, this is a little too much and too fast for me to handle, and I feel a tremendous pressure on me from the rapid developments that have taken place.

"Xuan De, we have now crossed the Ying river. Shouchun should not be too far away now." Feng Xian said as she looked at the map Meng De gave us.

Even though we were about to enter a battlefield, a puppy's head poked out of a gap in Feng Xian's plate armour.

"Feng Xian, are you really bringing Red Hare?"

"Un, I will feel empty if I leave it in Xuchang," Feng Xian laughed as she looked lovingly at Red Hare, who was at her chest, as Red Hare stared back at her with its big eyes.

In Feng Xian's eyes, Red Hare should be more than just a pet already.

"... B, but Feng Xian, you better protect it as anything can happen on the battlefield." Yun Chang, who was riding on Feng Xian's right, said, her eyes never moving off of the cute Red Hare.

"Kyaa~~~ So cute~~~" Yi De squealed as she played with Red Hare's little paws, and was fawning over Red Hare so much her eyes became ><.

Though my little sisters weren't able to get the puppy in the Battle of Hulao Pass, they were still pretty happy with how it is now, since Feng Xian doesn't mind sharing it with them from time to time.

"My lord, we should be able to see Shouchun city soon."

While I was watching them playing with the puppy, Gong You, who had been riding beside me, pressed up close and reminded me.

"Oh, I got it."

I looked over and saw that her riding posture was just as bad as mine. Just as I was about to ask where the other 2 were, the answer came within sight.

Zi Zhong and xiao Yong's riding skills seemed to be even worse than Sun Qian, and they were having a tough time keeping up with the main body. It feels like they're getting slower and slower and it might be faster if they went on foot instead.

Didn't these 3 come greet us on horses when we went to Xu state? I don't remember them being this slow. Could it be because horses here are bigger?

And even if they're administrative officials, horse-riding is an essential skill... Though I don't have the right to say that since my skill is about the same as Sun Qian.

Even though I've been riding a horse for so long, my riding skill has not improved in the least. My hands are still gripping the reins too tightly and my legs are clinging on to the saddle too tightly. If I'm not too careful, I can still get flung off easily.

"Gong You, when did you start riding horses?"

"From the time we left Xuchang for Shouchun." Sun Qian said expressionlessly. No, that's her usual look. What a pity, her smile is really beautiful.

"... Un, I, let's keep practicing." I laughed dryly as I patted Gong You's shoulders.

I nearly embarrassed myself.

I had wanted to elevate my confidence as her senior in horse-riding but I didn't think that she reached my level, which took me about half a year, with just 6 or 7

days of riding. What could I possibly say in response to that?

“But big brother, was leaving Gan Qing and the rest in Xuchang really the tight choice?” Yun Chang asked.

I turned around and looked at her, and saw that she held Red Hare in her arms. Her face was light red from excitement and had a funny expression from her efforts in trying to suppress her elation and excitement.

“Though I too want to bring them along, if something happens, things will get sticky.” I looked up to the sky as I said so, and from within the clouds, I could see the figures of Gan Qing and Mi Zhen.

No no no, those 2 aren't dead~~~

Though I've not personally gone onto the battlefield, I know from looking on from the side that battles are dangerous. I don't wish for any harm to come to Gan Qing and Mi Zhen who are just ordinary people.

Before we left, I used this reason and copious amounts of effort to persuade Gan Qing and Mi Zhen (Mi Zhen was actually supportive of them going with us) to stay. Hua Tuo also stayed as well, as she said she wanted to learn the methods of the palace physicians. I thought that was a good reason and consented to it.

Staying behind in Xuchang wasn't that big a deal anyway as we would be returning after we're done here.

Returning...

It happens next week— That was what was written on the slip of paper.

If things went according to what was written on the slip of paper, then they should have acted by now. I wonder how it's like in Xuchang, and whether Meng De is safe.

The edict in the sleeve... I feel a strangely uneasy the moment I think about it... If only I'd wholeheartedly rejected it just like Ma Teng then, but then again my name was written already before I could say anything...

“Hai~~” I could only sigh at the situation I was in.

The one thing I need to think about now, is how to prove my innocence about that after I return.

Before that—

“Oh~~ Seems like we’ve reached.”

“Un? Is that so? ... We actually did.” I looked closely in the direction where Yi De pointed and could somewhat see the grey city walls from afar.

Though Yi De is small, her eyesight is superb, and can see a city from miles away even in a misty environment.

Looks like we are nearing Shouchun city.

Back to what I was saying earlier, before that, I still had to deal with the problem of Yuan Shu.

We rushed here in a mostly covert manner given that we didn’t announce our presence nor did we use the main roads. I was worried about enemy scouts at first but Meng De told me not to worry as Yuan Shu would not send scouts as she feels that doing so would not be upright.

Even so, we still kept our guard up along the way. We did not, however, spot any sign of scouts from Yuan Shu.

“Gong You, has the unit that went ahead to scout come back yet??”

“Un, just now.” I spied from the corner of my eye some troops who were just returning to their battalions, as Gong You turned to me and began her report. “The city defenses are very sparse. Looks like they haven’t detected our presence yet.”

“Un...”

I looked at the sky. The sun had begun descending toward the east. It was going to be late afternoon soon.

The weather now was quite different from a few months ago. It was now autumn and the nights were longer. Even though we could still see the sun, in 2-4 hours, it would completely go under the horizon.

I reckon if we rush now, we can launch an attack on the city before the sky turns dark.

“Big brother, I suggest we set up camp for today.” Just then, Yun Chang rode

over and spoke to me. "It won't be easy to assault the city with the troops we have now to begin with and with night coming soon, Yuan Shu might attack then as well."

"And the one advantage we have is that the other side does not know we are here. This is extremely beneficial as it allows us to seize the initiative." Zhang Liao, who had been riding some distance behind Feng Xian, rode up beside me and explained further.

"Un..." I looked up at the sky once more, "We'll set up camp then."

I had been telling myself all this while that the real battles were still a long time to come. But in reality, I would very likely be greeted one the very next day. Perhaps it's high time that I prepared myself.

After the tents were finally set up, night had fallen.

After giving the order to be as quiet as possible and that no lights are to be lit, we finally retired for the night. Tonight is the longest night available for us to rest these few days. For the sake of rushing here, we hadn't had a food rest at all every night.

And it just so happens that I am unable to fall asleep tonight.

It happens next week... Huh.

I was still preoccupied with the matter of the edict in a sleeve but because of the problem with communications, I can't know how it is in Xuchang immediately. By right, Meng De should be fine but until I've seen her in person, nothing is for sure.

"Hai—" I put some strength into my back and sat up on the makeshift bed made from wooden planks... Speaking of which, there seems to be some commotion outside—

"My lord!" I heard someone call me, and then Zhang Liao wrenched the tent open and ran inside with light footsteps so as not to make too much noise. "Are you alright?"

"Un, I'm alright." This question that came out of nowhere made me puzzled me. "Why? And why aren't you all asleep yet?"

“Please wear your coat first.”

“Ah, okay... No need to help me with it, I’ll do it myself.” I took the coat that Zhang Liao passed me, along with a full set of plate armor. “This is too heavy, I can’t move with it on.”

“My lord, can you don’t be so spoiled?”

“Hai, alright alright.”

Haven’t you seen Yun Chang and Yi De go without any plate at all? And you and Feng Xian only wear breastplates. Though I’m not the same level as you all, it should be alright.

“And so, what’s the matter?” I asked as I tightened my belt.

“Un, there were some movements in the forest which we think are from enemy scouts, so there is the possibility of a night raid.”

Un? Could it be that Yuan Shu has found us out?

“And what’s going on now?”

“Lord Yun Chang has quietly gathered a few soldiers and entered the forest with Lord Yi De.”

“What!?” Uneasiness filled my heart the moment I heard this, and I got up immediately and made my way to exit the tent. “Entering the forest at such a time is too dangerous!”

...

I thought about it a little more, and walked back and picked up the twin swords that were practically for display all this while, and then exited the tent.

When I left the tent, I found that Feng Xuan had picked out some soldiers.

“Feng Xian, what’s the matter?”

“There isn’t much of a commotion in the forest so it looks like it’s not a night raid.” Feng Xian said as she lightly swung the halberd in her hands.

“It’s a good thing you didn’t wake up too many people. We probably won’t get to have any sleep tonight.” Zhang Liao received a long polearm from the female soldier and swung it a few times with both hands. “Hai, I haven’t been in an

actual battle in a while.”

Un, everyone’s a warrior at heart huh. That fire in them has never diminished even after all this while.

“Stay here Xuan De. I’ll bring a few people in.” Feng Xian said and made to leave. Seems like she didn’t bring Red Hare with her this time.

“No, I’m coming as well.” I said as I caught up with her and used all my strength to wield the 2 heavy swords in my hands. “I’ve even brought my weapons.”

“Xuan De?” Feng Xian turned back and looked at me with a surprised expression. “Maa, that’s fine as well.”

It was very dark in the forest and if it was the usual me, I would definitely be willing to wait outside. But things were different now. I’m now the Governor of Yu state, I’m now the general of 10,000 men who has come to assault Yuan Shu, and I’m everyone’s lord.

“My lord! How can you let our lord be exposed to danger just like that?” Feng Xian didn’t say much, but Zhang Liao was quite worried as she berated Feng Xian.

“Wen Yuan,” Feng Xian said as she delicately patted Zhang Liao’s back, “The responsibility of protect our lord is in your hands?”

“My lord! How can you do that~~” Zhang Liao said with a troubled look.

... I feel like they’re pretty rude.

— Don’t move!

Just then, Yun Chang’s voice could be heard from inside the woods.

“!” The moment we heard Yun Chang, Feng Xiao wielded the halberd and the look of beast appeared on her face. “In any case, let’s get there quickly. Be careful of your footing and the tall grass.”

“Un,” Zhang Liao gestured toward the soldiers to follow her and then turned to me. “Stay close, my lord.”

I nodded, and then followed them into the forest.

Chapter 3: Don't tell me this is a misunderstanding (2)

TL: Yun Chang POV

It was late in the night, and the curtains of darkness had descended upon the forest. Tonight's moonlight was exceptionally bright, so bright that it was comparable to the full moon of midautumn. But even so, it could not shine through the myriad layers of yellowing leaves, and only scattered dots made it through to the forest floor.

Because we were afraid of exposing our presence, we never lit any lights since the sky turned dark, and now we can only count on our sense of touch to advance further.

From time to time, the cries of insects would resound from the tall grass. I don't know what insect that is, all I know is that the cries were chilling and were cries that the dying made.

"Tread lightly everyone, and listen closely for anything out of the ordinary." I lightly ordered, and Yi De as well as the 2 platoons of soldiers nodded slightly in affirmation.

Just now, as I was lying in my tent, I heard some dubious noises and sounds of people talking coming from the forests. I'd thought that it was my misconception or some soldier had awoken suddenly for some reason and emerged from my tent, not fully suspicious that mischief may be at work. However, I didn't expect that everyone had also heard what I heard.

Because I felt that something was amiss, I told Feng Xian and the rest before bringing this small band into the forest to investigate.

For me, the cries of insects was truly a hindrance. Not only did it interfere with my sense of hearing, it also impaired my concentration.

— *Sou Sou*

(TL: Sound of something zooming past, like an arrow or someone sprinting.)

Behind!

“Take care of your back!” I yelled and raised my glaive as I turned and stared at the tall grass.

“Behind, is it?”

“Yi De wait—”

“Yaa~”

Before I could even finish my words, Yi De had already swept up the Serpent Spear which seemed at odds with her size, and turned in the air before slamming it down onto the tall grass.

Because of her height, Yi De had to jump up in the air to exert strength.

All we heard was a *Bang!*, and the 2 trees shuddered as many leaves fell.

“... How was it?” I weakly asked.

“Nobody, it doesn’t feel like I cut anyone.” Yi De said disappointedly.

On hearing this, I heaved a small sigh of relief.

Hai~~~~ I really can’t stop her. What if the other side had set a trap?

Maa, I do have to admit that my little sister is not the average reckless idiot who will be easily taken in by a surprise attack.

“Un, the presence that had been hiding in the grass has dissipated.” I said as I inspected the area. “But don’t get careless and pay attention to your surroundings. What we heard just now was not a delusion. They are definitely still nearby.”

Are they spies? How many? 1... From the presences, a maximum of 2.

“But big sister, you really are impressive, to be able to tell the enemy’s position so quickly just from detecting their presence.” Yi De said nonchalantly with no nervousness whatsoever as she put in strength into her arms to pull out the Serpent Spear that was stuck in the ground, throwing up much soil about.

“It’s nothing much. You can learn it if you just sit around quietly a little more.” I swept my vision across the surrounding tall grass before focusing on areas further afield. “But now is not the time for this, if you want to learn it, I can teach you any time.”

“No, I don’t want to. Too troublesome.”

“ ... ”

Yi De... Can’t you give me some face in front of 2 platoons...

—*Sou Sou*

Un?

“General Guan, it came from the south this time.”

“Un, I heard it.”

The opposite direction from before huh? ...

— *Sou Sou*

Un?!

“Th, this one came from the west!”

“Everyone be careful, there are 2!!” I focused my line of sight on the centre of these 2 directions as I called out to be able to defend attacks from both direction.

— *Sou*

“Th, there’s movement on this side as well!”

What?! The east as well?

— *Sou*

“Big sister, there are sounds coming from the direction where we first heard sounds from.” This time, even Yi De heard it loud and clear.

“Tch!” I clicked my tongue as I raised my glaive anxiously.

Does this mean that we have been surrounded? ... I’d thought there were only one or two but now things have gotten troublesome.

And just like that, the sounds of something moving through the grass came from all 4 directions. These sounds were making me much more infuriated than the insect cries.

“Big sister, what do we do now? Attack in all directions?”

“No! It’s too dangerous!” I firmly denied Yi De’s suggestion.

Attacking in all directions meant scattering our forces, and with so many sounds in the grass, we don’t know how many the other side has...

“...”

Un? Wait a second.

“Big sister?”

“Be quiet for a moment...”

Sou Sou Sou

I listened closely to this unpleasant sound.

Sou Sou Sou

... So that’s what it’s about.

“Oh~” I probably had a look of realisation now.

These sounds were not because many people were moving about. They were made intentionally!



When listening closely, the sounds that came from all 4 directions had a certain rhythm, and sounded like someone who was kicking the grass on 2 sides of the road in turn as they walked.

Like this... Are there 4 people? No, less than 4... I can only detect 2 presences.

But thinking about it from their angle, why would they try to attack us when we have a numerical advantage? Do they not know their limits or is this action backed by legitimate strength...

“Ah~~~ Hu~~~” I took a deep breath and gave a long exhalation while I was deep in my thoughts. “Stay here everyone, and don’t move... Ah, Yi De you too.”

“Eh eh? Why?”

“Just do as I say first.”

I brushed off Yi De who pouted at this, and closed my eyes once more. I then stuck my Green Dragon Crescent Blade into the ground and grabbed a clump of hair with my left hand and stroked it.

‘What people call cultivation is to understand oneself, and also understanding nature and the world in the process of doing so.’ This was something Wen Yuan said to me not long after we met. I felt that it made sense and made it a personal ethos of mine.

Being able to detect presences was something I slowly learnt after that.

I relaxed both my mind and body. Now, all I needed to do was to be one with nature and focus on what my instincts told me.

An instant later, I opened my eyes.

The left!!!

“Yaa~~~~~” As I roared out, I pulled out my glaive that was stuck in the ground and swung it with my left at the tall grass and trees to my left!

The shockwave from the sharp blade laid waste to everything that the Green Dragon Crescent Blade swept through, slicing through the tall wild grass and leaving slash marks on trees.

Just then, an unexpected *ding* rang out as the blade of my Green Dragon Crescent Blade was stopped by another weapon that emerged from the grass.

Was there someone as expected? Looks like their reaction is pretty quick.

Because it was too dark, and they were still hiding in the grass, I could not tell who they were.

“You— Wu!!” Just as I was about to ask, a silver light shot out from the grass next to me and I had to retract my glaive and jump back.

“Ya~~~~” Yi De yelled as she somersaulted towards the grass patch and slashed down— “... Un? ... Tch, there’s no one again!”

Though Yi De had reacted swiftly in the follow-up attack, it did not land on its

mark.

“Don’t worry, this way!” I pointed as I began running while Yi De and the rest followed suit. “Seems like this fellow has a poor constitution as their breathing seems rather ragged.”

And wasn’t this fellow using double short spears? That’s a pretty rare weapon huh~~

Of the people I know, only one uses twin short spears. But she wouldn’t be here right? We haven’t met since we left Beihai after all.

While I was deep in my thoughts, the figure of the one ahead could be seen from the few rays of moonlight that made it through the forest.

“Stop running!” Yi De from behind bellowed loudly all of a sudden, which I must admit gave me quite a shock.

“Yi De what are you shouting for?! They’re going to run even harder now that you shouted!”

“Oh right!” Yi De exclaimed as she scratched her head in realisation. I looked at the figure again helplessly and as expected it appeared to be getting away.

“Yi De, bring some troops and cut them off!”

“I got it.” Yi De replied and then brought a platoon through a different route.

Kuh, that fellow seems to have increased their pace, did they sense that we sent a team to cut them off? It feels like they won’t make it at this rate.

“... Ah!~~~”

Un?

Just as I was about to give up, the figure in front slipped and cried out in the gentle voice of a young girl.

Un... What a clumsy spy huh.

“Ou~~~~ Ch~~” She was still moaning, and it was so loud that even we could hear it clearly.

And in the time when she fell, we chased up and quickly narrowed the gap.

“Thief! Give up already!” I yelled at her as she appeared in full view and began to advance more cautiously.

“... Kuh!”

The figure that had been lying on the ground suddenly rotated and stopped in a kneeling position before slashing at my calf with the short spear in her left hand.

“Naive!” I did not step back, and instead blocked the blow with the hilt of my glaive. After her left spear ricocheted off my hilt, she rotated again with the momentum and slashed toward my right calf. Just as before, I did not back up and gripped my Green Dragon Crescent Blade tightly as I leapt above the trajectory of the spears. Immediately after I leapt up, I positioned myself so that I landed on the flat of the spears and firmly held them to the ground with my body weight.

“Don’t bother struggling further! If I’d wanted to, your head would have left your body long ago!” I roared toward the fellow on the ground who was still in a kneeling position. Because of the difference in height, her face was still not visible.

“...”

“Un?” I’d said all there had to be said but she still remained silent.

All of a sudden, her hand reached up above her head straight for me.

“What!” I instinctively raised my glaive to block but then remembered that she no longer had any weapons.

A feint!

The feint worked and by the time I raised my glaive, the figure had charged ahead and stood up from a forward roll before running off.

“Kuh! Stop—”

“Stop running~~”

Before I could finish my words, I heard another deep voice from the forest ahead.

Un? This voice is...

Just as I thought up till here, the owner of the voice appeared before me with a torch in her hand and a halberd in the other which was pointed at the figure from before.

“Feng Xian!”

“Oh! Yun Chang, you’ve been hard at work huh!” Feng Xian said with her usual expression.

Thank to the light from her torch, I began to gradually see the figures behind Feng Xian. Wen Yuan was naturally there, and...

“Yun Chang, are you alright?”

“Big brother?! Why did you come here! It’s dangerous here!!” I exclaimed as I walked over to big brother.

“I was worried so I followed them.” Big brother said casually as he rubbed his head.

I had more to say, but when I saw the twin swords, which big brother could barely even swing, hanging by big brother’s waist, the anger in my heart dissipated instantly.

Instead, warmth filled my heart and, regretfully, made my cheeks turn red.

“Wh, what kind of danger would we be in? Who do think we are huh?” I stammered as I put my hands on my hips and turned my face so he wouldn’t see my embarrassed look.

“Maa, that is right.” At times like this, big brother would always let things go. He really doesn’t know what I’m thinking. And then he turned to the shadowy figure. “This must be the enemy scout!”

“Ah ah, I’ve been chasing her all night.” I answered, and walked over to big brother to have a good look at the scout under the light from the torch.

Un? Why is she wearing a mask?

“Don’t bother saying anymore and just kill me.” That person said harsh words but her delicate tone was devoid of any strength.

“Maa, it wouldn’t hurt to talk for a bit. Come, for starters, say where you—” Big brother walked over and peeled off her mask. But when we saw who she was, we were all stunned. “Tai, Taishi Ci?!”

No wonder I kept getting the feeling that I’d seen her attack patterns before. Along with a slim and small figure as well as a delicate voice, she is without a doubt, Taishi Ci.

But... Why is she here?

“Eh? Ah, sorry about it, I have a bit of nightblindness so I can’t see so clearly yet.” Taishi Ci seemed very calm as she rubbed her eyes roughly while we brought the torch closer. “Ah~~ Let me see— L, Lord Liu Bei!!!”

“Ah, hello.” Big brother gave a stiff greeting with an even stiffer smile in response to Taishi Ci’s surprised expression.

“Th, then the one just now with the glaive is—” Taishi Ci said as she pointed at me.

Now then you know huh.

“In any case, what’s going on? Can you explain yourself?”

Attacking all of a sudden, could it be that Taishi Ci had joined Yuan Shu? If that’s the case, then she really has fallen.

“Ah, that’s right, I should explain everything clearly. But let me start by introducing myself, since my position has changed quite a bit since the time we met in Beihai.” Taishi Ci finally stood up and said in a respectful tone. “I am the Subduing General of the Household, Taishi Ci Taishi Zi Yi, and my lord is now Sun Ce Sun Bo Fu. I have come with my lord to eradicate the traitor Yuan Shu.”

Chapter 4: Don't tell me this is my first meeting with Sun Ce (1)

TL: Scrapping my plan to do the extras on weekends... The next few parts are really good and I want to get to the parts when ~~more people die~~ plot happens.

“So, Lord Liu Bei is here to attack Yuan Shu as well? — Ah, thanks.”

We extinguished the flames and explained our purpose for coming here in the dark to Taishi Ci who nodded from time to time as she listened. As she listened, she received the twin short spears from Yun Chang, and sheathed them on her back, not forgetting to place her hands at their base so they wouldn't move about.

“That's right, but this army belongs to Meng De, and the idea of attacking Yuan Shu is also hers.” I said as I sat on a tree stump. Everyone else was also sitting or standing about. “It's been a while but I didn't think that you'd gone and joined Sun Ce already.”

“Maa maa, it's something fairly recent.” Taishi Ci rubbed her head shyly, seems like she's thinking back to when she first met Sun Ce.

“But why did you come to spy on us?”

“It's a misunderstanding! Really, just a misunderstanding!” Taishi Ci exclaimed as she frantically shook her head. “My lord detected some movements over on this side and thought that it was reinforcements from Liu Biao at the behest of Yuan Shu. As time was of the essence, my lord decided not to send ordinary acouts, and sent me and Lu Meng over instead. Thereafter, I met with Yun Chang and the rest.”

“Hai, if only we'd reported our names to each other at the beginning.” Yun Chang said regretfully as she shook her head, seems like she feels that it has been a waste of time.

But Lu Meng is here too huh?

I looked about but did not see Lu Meng's figure.

“That’s strange, where did Lu Meng run to?” It wasn’t just me, Taishi Ci herself did not know where Lu Meng went and was looking about as well.

“Did Lu Meng get lost?” I said as I looked about again... Un? “Yun Chang, where did Yi De go?”

“That’s right, I was thinking about that as well.” Yun Chang said as she brought her to her chest and stared into the forest as she stroked her hair. “I asked her to cut off Taishi Ci earlier but the light from the torch should have drawn her over by now right?”

It’s already very late, and anyone could get lost in these woods... Could Yi De have gotten so tired while in the forest that she just gave up and fell asleep somewhere? Children’s bodies can’t stand late nights after all...

— *Dong~~~~* Along with the booming sound, a gust of wind which carried soil and the scent of leaves came billowing over.

“What was that?” I asked as I stood up and faced the direction of the air current, and stared unblinkingly into the darkness.

The others had drawn their weapons and readied their stances, while listening closely for more sounds.

“From what we heard, seems like a big tree fell.”

“Could this be Yuan Shu’s night raid?!”

“No, Yuan Shu cannot possibly launch a night raid from the opposite direction of the city, and there were no horses to be heard.”

— *Dong~~~~~* Along with the air current, another tree came crashing down.

“That’s amazing, to think someone could fell a tree just like that...”

“Lord Taishi Ci, now is not the time to be impressed.”

“My lord, please stand back.”

“The sound this time is much closer.” Yun Chang said as she quickly walked over to where I was and stood in front of me with her broadsword, and listened closely for more sounds to discern the source.

— “Stop running you idiot!”

!!

Th, this voice is...

“Yi, Yi De’s voice?!” Yun Chang cried out in surprise.

— “You’re the idiot~~”

Another tender voice, much like Yi De’s, could be heard, but I don’t recall ever hearing it before.

“Eh? This voice... Isn’t it Lu Meng?” Taishi Ci said as she tilted her head in typical air-headed fashion and then dropped her guard as she sheathed her weapons again.

“Lu Meng?!” Though Taishi Ci was very calm saying this, I was very surprised to hear the name. “Then that means—”

Yi De is fighting with Lu Meng?

— “You bastard! Is running away all you know!”

— “This is called battle tactics, not that a crazy flatchested woman like you would know!”

Another tree fell.

— “Wh, what! Aren’t you flatchested as well huh?!”

“...” It’s about time these 2 stopped their fight. “Yun Chang, Feng Xian.”

“Understood.”

“Un.”

Yun Chang and Feng Xian acknowledged my order without my needing to say it and advanced towards the sounds with their weapons raised.

“Huh, so they aren’t enemies to begin with~~ Really, you should have told me big sister.”

“How could I have told you...”

Yi De complained to Yun Chang unhappily but because Yun Chang did feel partially responsible, she could only weakly retort while smiling helplessly.

At least Yi De wasn't injured, though her clothes were sliced up quite a bit and were rife with holes. From the holes, one could see Yi De's delicate and smooth skin. Under the weak moonlight, this young lady appeared deliciously seductive in my eyes.

De, delicious, what am I thinking...

"Lord Taishi Ci, if you could have known earlier that this was a misunderstanding, then there wouldn't be so much trouble."

"Lu Meng, don't demand so much from someone with nightblindness."

"Hmph! Really, look at how I am now."

On the other side, Lu Meng was frowning and pouting with her thin lips as she walked towards Taishi Ci. Because of the fight with Yi De just now, she was covered in soil and leaves and looked terrible.

But just as I expected, Lu Meng is a girl too. Her age seems to be about the same as Yi De, probably about 13 or 14. Her beautiful brown hair was tied back in a ponytail with 2 tails at the side, making her look even more like a kid. A pair of deep obsidian eyes were set in her slightly round face, and gave the impression that she was a naive little girl who had not yet gone through any hardship. But this impression changes immediately to one of caution when one sees the hook swords in her hands. Though her clothes were sky blue in colour, she wore a red cloth around her right hand which stood out against the rest of her clothes.

(TL: In case you forgot, Yi De is 16.)

"Stop complaining about this and that, where were you when I got discovered?"

"I, I saw that the situation wasn't favourable and decided to follow in secret and wait for an opportunity." After getting retorted and questioned by Taishi Ci, Lu Meng struggled to find a reply as she stammered. "... But I didn't know they would divide their forces."

"What!! You still have the cheek to say that?!" Yi De couldn't listen any further jumped over to where Lu Meng was, "Our operations were going well but then you suddenly jumped down from the trees and even injured my subordinate."

“You talk too much, muscle woman! I was actually planning to pin you down but even so, there wasn’t the need to chop down the tree I landed on right!”

“How was I to know who you were then! And didn’t you slice my clothing as well? How are you going to compensate me huh!”

Hai, no matter how strong their skills are at martial arts, no matter how fierce their personalities are, a kids’ fight is a kids’ fight huh...

“Stop arguing, or do you still want a taste of what I and Yun Chang can do?”

“Hii!” “Eep!”

Just as the 2 were about to come to blows once more, Feng Xian uttered that line in a low voice and made the 2 who were arguing cry out in weird voices. They turned to look at Feng Xian, and then shook hands and wore smiles on their faces.

I don’t know if it’s my misconception but I could see much fear in the smiles of those 2.

We followed behind Taishi Ci, as we headed to Sun Ce’s encampment.

We were planning on returning to our respective camps after this but Taishi Ci suddenly proposed a meeting between me and Sun Ce. “I speak of you often with my lord, and she has also expressed an interest in meeting you.”

Maa, I’m not too tired so might as well.

I let Zhang Liao bring back the soldiers while Feng Xian and my 2 little sisters went along with me to Sun Ce’s camp on the other side of the forest.

“But is visiting General Sun Ce at such a late time alright?”

“Ah, it’s fine it’s fine. My lord is a night owl and won’t sleep until the time when people usually wake up.”

... Looks like she’s another weirdo.

It was way past the middle of the night but we were still travelling in the forest. The cries of insects were slowly fading away and the forest became deeper and quieter.

In the midst of primal nature is when one can feel how small and helpless one

truly is.

Every time, I have such feelings, I will always try to apply stuff I learnt from god knows where, and try to be one with nature. Whenever I do so, I always feel great relief from letting go of pessimistic thoughts and derive new insights to unresolved problems.

And so every time I am met with such scenes, I will feel a prickling, comfortable warmth in my heart.

As we walked, Yun Chang and Yi De were explaining to Feng Xian what happened just now in the forest in detail; and soon, we saw the light from fires between the trees.

Chapter 5: Don't tell me this is my first meeting with Sun Ce (2)

As we walked into their encampment, we found that the camp was brightly lit by torches everywhere and there were several soldiers silently and vigilantly patrolling. Seems like military discipline is fairly tight here.

As I looked over, I saw a girl with an aura of elegance sitting outside a large tent. She was looking at the night sky with a bottle of liquor and seemed to be deep in her thoughts.

“This is—”

“This is my lord, Sun Ce Sun Bo Fu.”

Though I'd guessed it already, looking from afar, she really does have an uncanny resemblance with Sun Jian.

“Let's do our greetings first.”

“Un.”

And so we went to where Sun Ce was and introduced ourselves before bowing.

“Oh~~ So you're Liu Bei Liu Yu Zhou huh~~ I heard of you from Taishi Ci.” Sun Ce hurriedly got up and bowed when she heard my name. “Seems like you recommended Taishi Ci to come over to my place back then. Because of that, I was able to gain a brave general. I owe you thanks for this.”

“A brave general~~” Taishi Ci covered her reddened face and fidgeted about.

“No need to specially thank me. In the end, the one who chose her lord was herself after all.” I bowed once more as I said so.

As I bowed, I took a good look at Sun Ce under the illumination of the torches.

Since she's Sun Jian's daughter, she's probably about 16 or 17. Her yellowish hair was short, and only extended to the lower half of her neck. Her fringe, on the other hand, was long and almost covered her eyes entirely. Under her high bridged nose was a small, elegant and dignified mouth, which was slowly chewing on a pastry presently.

Overall, Sun Ce seemed like a good-natured person but the aura of a beast that hung about her exposed the fighting spirit in her.

“Un, what brought you here.”

Ah, that’s right. We haven’t gotten into the main topic yet.

And so, we quickly gave her a run through of what happened and finally resolved the misunderstanding.

“Hahaha, so that’s what it was huh. And you even came here specially to explain it.” Sun Ce said as she laughed loudly and then returned to a calm expression. “But then that means Taishi Ci has need for more training huh, how could you have let your weapons be stopped just like that?”

Just then I realised, behind her long fringe were a pair of eyes that held a gaze as sharp as wolves and just looking at them sent a chill down your spine.

“Ah... Yes.” Taishi Ci said softly with her head hung low.

“What General Sun Ce said is not quite appropriate.” Just then, Yun Chang stepped up, which surprised Taishi Ci and Sun Ce. “I believe that General Taishi Ci’s skills are top notch and the only reason why I was able to defeat her in a short span was purely because of luck. Additionally, when you consider General Taishi Ci’s nightblindness, my win isn’t spectacular in the least. If we should cross swords once more, I’m not sure the result will be the same.” Everyone sank into silence after hearing what Yun Chang said in one breath.

I understand that Yun Chang’s intent in saying so was not to support Taishi Ci, but because she really thinks highly of Taishi Ci’s skills and feels that her victory was not conclusive.

Since she thought as much, she said so. Saying what she means is one good quality of Yun Chang’s after all.

After a moment of silence, Sun Ce broke into laughter.

“Hahaha~~~” She laughed as she walked over to me, who was slightly taller than her, and patted my shoulders. “You really have an interesting bunch of subordinates huh.”

“Un, I think so too.” I said, and heaved a sigh of relief as Sun Ce was not

angered. “But personally speaking, I’d rather call them my companions.”

“Maa maa, anything goes.”

“Un? Oi, this...”

“Taishi Ci, bring Liu Bei’s companions to somewhere they can rest. I’ll be speaking with Lord Liu Bei.” Sun Ce said as she pulled me into the tent, not forgetting to grab the wine bottle that was not empty yet.

Entering the tent, I found that though it was large, it was mostly empty except for a bed, a desk covered in bamboo scrolls and an armour rack.

Come to think of it, this is a girl’s room right... No, this is something different altogether on various levels.

No good, I don’t know what to say all of a sudden.

“Hai, I scared my subordinates again.” Sun Ce said all of a sudden.

“Ah?”

“Eyes, my eyes~” She said as she parted her fringe, revealing the ferocious pair of eyes that gave me such a shock, I backed up. On seeing my reaction, Sun Ce looked very sad. “As expected, my eyes are just too hateful.”

“Eh! Oi! Don’t dig out your eyes!”

I hurriedly ran over and stopped Sun Ce’s stupid act... So that’s why you let your fringe grow out huh.

It took a great deal of persuasion before Sun Ce finally regained her composure.

“Sorry, I lost my composure just now.” Sun Ce said as she sat on the side of the bed and scratched her head tiredly before rearranging her fringe so that it covered her eyes.

“No, it’s okay.” Everyone has a side of themselves that they don’t like. “And besides, there’s nothing wrong with your eyes, aren’t they actually quite beautiful?”

“Be, beautiful?!”

“If I said your gaze isn’t sharp, I would be lying. But after a closer look, the

bright luster is rather comforting.”

“Wu...” Sun Ce shrank into a corner of the bed.

Un? Why is Sun Ce’s face turning red? As expected, staying up late isn’t a good habit huh.

And I don’t know why but it became silent in the tent. I don’t know what else I should say either.

“By the way—” Sun Ce suddenly spoke up, which surprised me and I could only give a “Wh, what?” in reply as I waited for her to continue— “We came here in secret...”

“Then why did you light fires huh? Won’t they find you out like this?!”

“Ah.”

“Hai~ Realising it now is too late...” I sighed heavily as I shook my head.

All pressure I had felt dissipated the moment I gave her a tsukkomi.

As expected of Sun Jian’s daughter, whether it’s her personality or how she leads her troops, both are reckless and do what they want without thinking about the consequences.

“Maa, if it’s like that, then it can’t be helped.” She actually accepted things immediately, and got back up on the bed. “But my calling you here is not for this. All I wanted was to thank you. For the matter about my father, thanks.”

“Thank me?”

“Un,” She nodded, and began explaining when she saw my puzzled look. “Back when my father left Luoyang, you told him not to pass through Liu Biao’s territory right.”

“Ah, I did say that.” You’re thanking me just because of that? ... I can’t accept it. “Maa, I’m actually quite guilty about that. If I had been more adamant about it, maybe Lord Sun Jian—”

“I understand my father’s temperament full well. No matter how much you try and talk him through, he will still follow his path.” Sun Ce interrupted my apology and smiled, perhaps from recalling how her father was, but the smile turned into

a sorrowful one shortly after.

“I should be the one feeling guilty. The precious Jade Seal which my father went through hell and high water was handed over for the sake of grabbing more territory by me, and now things have become like this.”

“This” probably refers to the matter of Yuan Shu declaring herself Emperor.

“So you came here with the intention of fixing the problem you created?”

“Ah, that is part of the reason. Honestly, I’m just here to grab more territory.” She said honestly, without hiding anything at all. “So if we manage to conquer Shouchun, we’ll have to discuss how to divide the territory then.”

Sun Ce’s expressions changed a lot, and now it was one of a sharp merchant. At this, I only shrugged and said, “We’ll discuss this when the time comes.”

After we concluded our discussions, I looked outside the tent and found that the sky was much bluer than before. Looks like dawn is not too far away. The nights now were long but the night of yesterday has now passed us. The passage of time is really difficult to grasp.

“We’ll be heading back first then. We’re going to launch our offensive on Yuan Shu today after all.” I stretched my back in a show of nonchalance at the coming battle as I said so. In reality, my heart was already racing.

“Un, everything that needs to be said has been said.” Sun Ce put down the wine bottle and got up from the bed. “Well then, let’s coordinate our attacks, how does 09:00 sound?”

“... How many have you brought?”

“Less than 20,000.”

Though Sun Ce’s position had probably been exposed, joining forces with her is still much better than going solo against 30,000 strong with my force of 10,000.

“Alright, got it.” I replied and made to leave but then remembered something and then spoke up to Sun Ce who was behind me. “Aren’t you going to sleep for a bit?”

“...” She should probably be looking at my back now wordlessly but she can’t see my expression at this time. After a moment, Sun Ce finally stammered in

reply. “H, how can I have a good sleep when war is upon us~~~”

“... Maa, take care of yourself.” I parted the covers and exited the tent as I said so.

No matter how capable she is, she is only 16 and being afraid of battle is understandable. Sun Ce, you’ve probably been working tirelessly since you’ve been made to inherit your father’s position all of a sudden.

Thereafter, I returned to our encampment with Yun Chang and the rest before the sun came up, and we communicated to the rest on the agreement with Sun Ce to assault the city at 09:00.

I’d thought then that everything would go according to plan and any surprises would only crop when we attacked the city.

But this way of thinking was merely my naive delusions. In war, the situation can change drastically with every step on the battlefield. Some changes have always been brewing since the very beginning, and were only undiscovered until it’s too late.

And right at 08:30, Sun Ce’s army mutinied.

Chapter 6: Don't tell me this is the poisoning by Ji Ping (1)

TL: Meng De's POV, it's a cliffhanger, but it's necessary and quite honestly, the next few chapters are pretty good. If you read the original, I think you would agree with me that this Cao Cao is one that does justice to the original.

Ah~~~ My head hurts so bad~~~~

I lay on my seat as waves of pain assaulted me which made me frown and left no strength in me to concentrate on the bamboo scroll in my hands.

Was this from overexhaustion? ... I'd thought that sheer willpower alone would render me invincible but who knew that my body would give way so quickly.

"My lord, are you alright." Just as I was moaning softly, a gloomy but clear voice came from the back of my seat. "Should I get a physician to have a look at you?"

This voice, and this strange entrance... Is it Cheng Yu?

"Ah, I'm fine, just a little bit of overexhaustion. Nothing a little rest won't cure." I forced a smile and tried to turn to face her but because I hadn't moved my neck in a while, it was difficult to do so and I gave up after a few times. "Ah, speaking of which, where is Xun Yu? She's not together with you?"

These 2 are usually like Li Dian and Yue Jin and are always together, probably because of how similar their personalities are.

"My lord, are you confused? Hasn't Xun Yu gone with General Dian Wei to attack Zhang Xiu?"

"Oh, right. I almost forgot that." I slapped my head as I realised what I forgot—Ah! My headache got even worse... "Now that I think about it, those 2 must have left about the same time as Liu Bei."

It's been 7 days already since then.

— My lord, though I've left Zhong Kang behind, please be extra careful in this period when I'm not around.

“...”

For some reason, I recalled what Dian Wei said to me before she left.

It was really unexpected for E Lai who was usually so reckless to be so prudent and cautious that I couldn't help but be on my guard since then.

“My lord, I have something to say regarding Liu Bei.” Cheng Yu's small face suddenly appeared in front of me as she locked her 2 sleepy eyes on mine.

“Un? Go ahead and say it.” I answered casually as I rose up carefully whole enduring my head wouldn't sway, and gingerly picked up the tea cup on the table and sent its contents drop by drop into my mouth. “Although I can more or less guess what it is you want to say. Apologies for this, let me wet my throat first.”

I bent my wrist, and the warm tea flowed into my mouth. As I stared at the flow of tea, “Ha~ Much better.” I exhaled a hot breath filled with the scent of tea and set the cup down. “What you want to say is, Liu Bei should be killed right?”

“...” Silence means my guess is right. “Then my lord, can you tell me the reason why you haven't done so?”

“Un, actually.” Before I could finish my explanation, another voice cut me off.

“Actually, if we kill Liu Bei, then our lord who already suffers from a bad reputation will be even more hated by the people. If our lord loses the support of the people for good because of this, few talents would be willing to join our lord.”

“... That is correct, Feng Xiao.” I clapped in admiration, and then lowered my head. “But can you not emerge from under my chair so suddenly next time?”

I opened my legs, and looked at the ghost-like face of the young girl that appeared. Though this isn't something that will scare me, it's not something that I can get used to either.

Guo Jia would be perfect if not for her face that looks like that of a dead person which she uses to scare people. I wanted to cure her ailment but she

wouldn't allow it and kept dragging things on.

"Yes...*Hmph*..." At least Guo Jia is obedient, and she continued after crawling out from under my chair. "But my lord, I don't understand why you let him lead the strike on Yuan Shu."

"Un? What about it?"

"..." She was silent at my question, but from Guo Jia's expression, she should be thinking 'My lord, are you acting or are you for real', and continued after a short while. "My lord, why didn't you confine Lord Liu Bei in Xuchang? My lord should know that Liu Bei is dangerous right?"

"I do."

"My lord knows that Liu Bei will eventually be a force to be reckoned with?"

"I do."

"Then why did you let him go? Has my lord's brain fried out?"

"I'm still your lord, so be a little more respectful when you speak to me."

"... Ke." This fellow actually snickered, looks like she knows I won't punish her for this.

But Guo Jia is as ruthless as always huh... Indeed, letting go of Xuan De is a big mistake. Whether it is now, or in the history books in the future, this is and will be seen as a mistake.

"Maa, I have my own plans." I said as I stood up, but was soon assailed by the headache which hurt so much I had to hold on to the table for support.

"My lord, are you alright? You look like you might die in front of me just like that."

"Haha, Feng Xiao, that joke isn't very funny." I laughed dryly. My headache finally lightened up slightly and I got up as I rubbed my temple.

"Alright, you 2 get out first. I'm taking a nap." I said as I waved them away, and made for my sleeping quarters as I yawned.

The 2 who were usually mysterious in their mannerisms did not say anything more, nor did they pursue the question from earlier, and withdrew after they

bowed.

Now that I think about it, I haven't slept last night right.

Hai~~ No matter how much time I manage to squeeze out, the scrolls on my desk never decrease.

Why I let Xuan De go... Huh?

I wasn't exactly clear with Guo Jia, because this wasn't something nice or easy to say.

That's right, if I had to give a reason... It would be because I lack confidence.

I lack the full confidence that I can conquer the world and restore the Han, and so I let Xuan De go, to leave an alternate route for the Han.

Of course, whether heaven chooses me or Xuan De is a matter for later.

(TL: In the original, perhaps Cao Cao thought the same, because Cao Cao let Liu Bei leave even though his advisors had said no beforehand.)

"Aiyo~~" I moaned like an elderly person as I sat on the bed with difficulty and lay down on the bed— "Ouch!"

Looks like I can't do much else for a while... Ah, I'm so tired~~

I sighed helplessly and flattened my hair before I closed my eyes.

I don't know if it's because of exhaustion or my headache, but I lost consciousness shortly after lying down.

— Lord Cao Cao, don't move about.

Un? Who's calling me?

— Don't worry, it's alright.

I think I've heard this voice before, but I don't have a deep impression of it.

— I just need to slice open your head with this knife...

"Wa!!!" I awoke from my dream state in a fright on hearing this and grabbed the axe from under my pillow and slashed about me.

Was there an assassin?!

“Ah~~ Lord Cao Cao! Don’t move about so much! It’s me, I’m Hua Tuo!”

Who? Hua Tuo?

On hearing this, I calmed my nerves and set down the axe before rubbing my eyes and looking to the side. What appeared in my eyes was a girl with black wavy hair curled up in a seat, hugging her head as her shoulders trembled.

Hua Tuo... Oh, she’s Xuan De’s subordinate.

After remembering this, I lowered my guard slightly.

I then looked outside the room and saw it was late afternoon.

I didn’t think I would sleep for so long.

“What did you come here to do?!” I turned my head back and asked Hua Tuo as calmly as I could.

Even if she was Xuan De’s subordinate, I can’t drop my guard too much. As I thought so, my grip on the axe tightened somewhat.

“I met Lord Guo Jia on the way to the inn, and she asked me to take a look at your headache.”

“Hou~~” That Feng Xiao is so busybody. “But I heard you were talking about slicing open my head... What about it?”

Hua Tuo saw that I was willing to listen to her and got up from her curled up position and happily took out a small, sharp knife.

But this action, unquestionably made me frown again.

“Ah, Imperial Chancellor Cao need not worry, this knife is for curing diseases.”

“...”

I didn’t reply further, and just bade her to continue, as I was curious to see what she might say.

“Your illness now is not too serious yet. I felt about your head just now, and found a small hard bit.”

“...”

“And so, all I need to do is extract that bit with this small knife and it will be

alright.”

“...” What kind of fantastical and reckless method is this? To actually cut open my head? This is the first time I’ve ever heard of it. “... And what if something goes wrong?”

“It’s alright.” She said casually, and looked like she was brimming with confidence.

Alright? After hearing her describe the process, I’ve already gotten quite pale.

Though I’d heard from Xuan De that Hua Tuo’s medical techniques were top notch, having me open my head all of a sudden is a little too much.

“No, no need.” I laughed anxiously, and waved my hand. “It’s not serious, and I’ll be fine with some medicinal soup.”

“... Maa, your illness is indeed not serious. So medicine should be able to work.” Hua Tuo said with a tinge of sadness, but did not pursue the matter.

“Un, let’s do that then. Let’s talk about something more normal, how have you all been these few days?”

“Maa, we’re doing okay. Apart from some problems when teaching them cooking, everything else is still going well.” Hua Tuo said as she wiped the knife and kept it in her bag.

Hai~ This Xuan De, he actually left some people in Xuchang. He clearly has never thought about escaping.

(TL: This didn’t happen in the original of course, since Liu Bei wanted to leave.)

“Well then, what’s your next step to recovery?” Hua Tuo brought the conversation back to my illness. Seems like she feels responsible.

“Un, that’s right.” I’m not too knowledgeable about my body... “Hua Tuo, you’ve spent some time with the palace physicians. Who do you think is the best of them all?”

“Eh? You’re asking me?” Hua Tuo paused in thought at the unexpected question. “If it’s up to me to choose, I would choose Ji Ping. She is decisive in her diagnoses and precise in measuring medicinal herbs. Though she’s new, I’m sure her future is bright if she can do all this despite being new.”

I did ask her, but she said a little much. It's only a small matter, but whether it's her or my strategists, why do these people keep making such a big fuss about it?

“Then let Physician Ji Ping bring my some medicinal soup tonight.”

(TL: In the original, Cao Cao suffered from chronic headaches, which is possibly due to a brain tumour. It clearly wasn't serious though, as he lived to 65.)

Chapter 7: Don't tell me this is the poisoning by Ji Ping (2)

"I was planning on sending an assassin, but now I can save the trouble." State Uncle, who sat in front of me, said meaningfully as he clapped a few times.

I, Ji Ping, came to State Uncle the moment I received Imperial Chancellor Cao's orders. After I'd explained what happened, State Uncle clapped and commended the situation.

"Haa..." I felt uneasy seeing State Uncle being so jovial. "Then what you mean is..."

"Since Cao Cao has asked you to deliver medicine to her, then you can be the one to poison her." A rich young master— Wang Zi Fu said as he drank wine happily, with no majesty about him whatsoever.

I really don't know what I was thinking then, to have joined them in their plot.

"But, just m, me? Alone?!"

"Maa, little lady, everyone has their first time when it comes to murder~ Don't be so nervous."

It's too difficult. How could they let a weak young girl do this alone.

And though it seemed like a simple affair from what he said, in reality these are just empty words. When it comes down to it, no one else would dare to volunteer.

Hai~~ I really am unlucky. To think that I have to risk my life when I'm only a young girl in my teens. Just the tiniest mistake, and my life will be over.

The Han is important, but sometimes the value of life is higher.

"What are you mumbling about there huh?" State Uncle tightened his face and shouted at me on seeing my unwilling expression.

"Ah, nothing nothing, I'll do it." I hurriedly allayed their concerns and nodded as I smiled before leaving quickly.

Maa, forget it, no need to think too much. If I don't do it, I'll probably be toyed by these royals to the death anyway.

I steeled my heart, and went to prepare the herbs.

(TL: In the original, Ji Ping was truly loyal to the cause.)

(TL: This is the same reason our Xuan De here can't rat on them to Cao Cao. If he does, it will be easy to find out that Xuan De was the one who blabbered and then he and his subordinates will become targets for revenge. You might argue that Cao Cao could just execute the lot, which the original did by the way, but that would lose a lot of support from the Imperial Court, the people and the Emperor.)

It was now in the evening, and I brought my herbal pouch that was filled with the poisonous concoction into the Imperial Chancellor's house.

"Speaking of which, why is Lord Hua Tuo following me?"

I looked at the wavy haired girl beside me who was about one head shorter and felt that she was a nuisance.

This fellow is a skilled medical practitioner as well and it will be over if she detects something wrong with my herbs.

"Don't mind me, I came here to learn." She smiled innocently, and seemed like she really was here to learn from what I did.

I've spent a fair amount of time with Hua Tuo so I understand what she's like. To put it bluntly, she's just a kid.

But I can't be careless, who knows if an unintentional act of her's will ruin my plans?

For now, I just hope she doesn't ask about the herbs I'm using.

"What kind of herbs is Lord Ji Ping planning to use today?"

"!!" She asked it just when I was thinking about it!

"Un?" She looked at me with curious eyes and I couldn't help but look away.

My heart was racing badump badump and my scalp was getting drenched in sweat. I felt uncomfortable all over— This must be the stress from guilt.

“Ah... Ju, just some ordinary herbs which help facilitate blood circulation.”

I instinctively held my herbal pouch tighter. By the time I regained my composure, I realised that my actions were suspicious even from my own perspective.

“Un? Really?”

“What? Don’t come so close~~”

Hua Tuo squinted her eyes and stood on her tiptoes as she leaned over. We were already standing pretty close to begin with but now that she was leaning over, that distance became ever more miniscule. It feels... Like a distance at which I can kiss her— What am I thinking?! We’re both girls~

And this wasn’t the time to think about this, I had to dispel her suspicions first.

But this could be difficult. Unlike the past, children aren’t so easy to bluff these days.

“I got it!”

“!” Hua Tuo’s sudden exclamation of realisation gave me such a scare that I nearly dropped my herbal pouch. “Wh, what did you get?”

Hua Tuo smiled confidently when she heard my question. Her smile, only induced greater fear in me.

How much does she know? ... Ah! Could she have smelled the pungent smell of the herbs? Indeed, the poisonous herbs used this time have a distinct sourish smell.

I’m done for.

Kuh, I didn’t think I would be found out before I could even execute the assassination. And of all people, I was found out by a little kid.

I didn’t want to accept it but I could only give up as I loosened my clenched fist. Any amount of struggling won’t work now that I’ve been found out. I looked outside at the night sky in despair as I waited for the nightmare to begin.

“I understand,” Hua Tuo said as she took a step forward and gave me some breathing space. “The stuff you brought this time must a new concoction you

made yourself so you're not willing to tell anyone."

...

"Hah?" I couldn't understand what she said at that moment and responded instinctively.

"So as I was saying, the herbs you brought today must be a new mixture." Hua Tuo sneered as she elbowed my back. "You cunning fellow, I didn't think you would be working so hard behind the scenes."

... Could it be that Hua Tuo is just an idiot?

"Ah... Ah, right right right. I can't believe you found out!" I quickly seized the opportunity before me and went with the flow as I slapped Hua Tuo's back.

"Don't, underestimate, me. Apart, from carrots, nothing is, beyond me." She said choppily as I slapped her back.

Good, looks like she doesn't suspect me at all. I was thinking too much as expected.

As I turned around to look in front once more, Cao Cao's room was in sight. The sleeping quarters were still lit and Cao Cao's shadow was cast on the paper window shades by the candlelight.

That sagacious figure, was about to fall.

On entering the room, I was greeted with the picturesque sight of a beautiful white haired girl. She wore a plain sleeping gown and held a bamboo scroll on one hand while the other held a cup of steaming tea.

"Un?" She hurriedly put down the tea and scroll and got up to welcome us when she saw us come in. "You must be Ji Pong."

"I am a palace physician— My name is Ji Tai Ji Ping." I said as I respectfully bowed.

Cao Cao sized me up, before nodding, "I know I know, I've heard of you."

I shivered as I heard those words, and then Cao Cao asked a servant in the room to receive my herbal pouch. "Go and brew the medicine and send it to me. Don't just stand there, Physician Ji Ping and Hua Tuo. Come and have a seat."

Cao Cao gestured us as she said so and we sat on 2 vine chairs. As we sat down, servants from Cao Cao Cao's household brought us 2 cups of hot tea.

"Try it. It's a fresh batch of oolong tea." Cao Cao then returned to her bed and picked up the cup of tea from earlier which she gingerly drank from. "Un, this fragrance is not bad."

I picked up the cup as well and blew on the steam that floated on top of the liquid. As I blew, some of the steam brought the fragrance of the tea leaves into my nose and warmed my body from within.

"Shiku~~~~ Too hot!" Hua Tuo drank it a little too quickly and got scalded.

She really is a little kid...

I tested the temperature with my teeth before taking in a small sip of the slightly bitter tea. Un~~~ This is the first time I've ever had such good tea. It has the richness of black tea, and the aroma of green tea. The taste lingers in one's teeth and lips, making one crave for more.

I probably won't ever be able to buy such good tea leaves even with my lifetime's wages as a physician.

"How is the Emperor's health recently?" Cao Cao asked me, as she put down the cup.

"Ah, the Emperor is doing fine mostly. Thanks to the hard work of the Imperial Chancellor, the Emperor's appetite has also returned to normal." I answered truthfully, as the bronze cauldron which Cao Cao had sent was highly praised by the Emperor.

"Un, that's good. The Emperor's health is more important than anything else."

"... Ah, that's right." I went with the flow and replied as such. What right does someone like you, who is clearly trying to usurp the throne, have to talk about the Emperor? Though I am just a physician, I am still loyal to the Han. You, Cao Cao, have made the Son of Heaven your puppet, and massacred Xu state. How could you possibly hope to gain the hearts of the people?

"The medicine is ready." Just then, a servant brought in a small bowl containing soup made from the poisonous herbal mix I prepared.

“Oh, leave it there first.” But Cao Cao did not drink it immediately. Instead, she asked the servant to put it at the side while she continued talking to us.

I felt uneasy at the current situation, and my uneasiness only grew as the situation dragged on until I couldn't resist and asked. “... Imperial Chancellor, are you not going to drink?”

On hearing my words, Cao Cao got up and brought the bowl of soup over and looked at it before putting it back on the table. “It's still too hot, my tongue can't take it.” Cao Cao smiled helplessly with a frown as she pointed at her tongue.

... No good, I can't let this drag on.

“Come, let me blow it for you.” I said, and hurriedly brought over the bowl before waiting for a reply.

“No need no need, how I can possibly trouble you?” Cao Cao quickly got up when she saw what I was about to do and tried to stop me.

But how could I let you stop me?

“Haha, it's fine it's fine. Your health is more important.” I anxiously blew at the soup as I said so. “*Shiku*— Wu!”

Damn it! I drank some of the soup when I breathed in! Speaking of— Too, too hot!

“Hahaha, I didn't think a physician would be so careless~~” Cao Cao, who did not know what was really going on, only felt I was clumsy and laughed as she clapped.

Stay calm! If you swallow it, it's all over. I have to spit it out fast—

“Oi, are you alright?” Hua Tuo patted my back concernedly as she looked at my pained expression.

“*Gudu* ... Ah!!! What have you done?!!” It's over, Hua Tuo's pat made me swallow it!

“Un?”

This damned lass! She ruined everything!

The antidote! ... Antidote my foot! When did I ever prepare one?

“Un? What’s the matter? You don’t look too good.”

“I, I’m fine... A-re?” I realised that my vision had become blurry and my legs were like lead. With just a small breeze, my back bent over and my legs gave way.

... Am I going to die like this?

I slowly opened my eyes, and 2 faces appeared. It was Cao Cao and Hua Tuo.

What happened?

“Are you awake? Aiya, that really scared us.” Hua Tuo said as she heaved a sigh of relief when she saw that I had awoken.

“Seems like you got poisoned. At least Hua Tuo was nearby, or you would have been dead for sure.” Cao Cao smiled as she rapped my head. “You’re still in my room. No need to rush. Rest for a bit before you leave.”

... I’m still alive.

“That herbal mix seems to have contained poison.” Cao Cao continued. “Perhaps someone snuck them into your mix when you weren’t paying attention.”

“Eh?”

“Really, to think this sort of poison was actually used. Looks like whoever did it has quite a good understanding of medicine.” Hua Tuo said as she took out some powder from my herbal pouch— The powder was the poison I had brought.

But why?

Perhaps these next words were tantamount to a confession but I had to know, and steeled myself as I asked—

“... Doesn’t Imperial Chancellor suspect me?”

“Un? What sort of nonsense are you spouting?” Cao Cao said as she stroked my fringe and said as a matter of factly. “Someone who practices medicine, could never do something that brings harm to others.”

Chapter 8: Don't tell me this is the poisoning by Ji Ping (3)

TL: Last chapter before we get back to Xuan De's side.

After Hua Tuo and Ji Ping bowed and left, I looked at Ji Ping's back and her look of shame that appeared when she heard what I'd said floated in my mind.

"My lord, why did you not kill her?" A voice suddenly came from the rafters. There was no need to look to confirm who it was, it was definitely Cheng Yu. "Could it be that you actually think that the culprit isn't her?"

"Haha, you're actually asking that?" I lay back on the bed comfortably and stroked my eyebrows as I continued. "After seeing everything that has transpired, how could I not be aware that she was the culprit?"

Though it might be hypocritical of me to say so, but I've never trusted that physician from the very beginning. Which is why I let Hua Tuo follow, as insurance against any mishap I might encounter, but who knew that she would ended up drinking it instead.

"Then why did you not kill her?"

"Why do I have to kill her?"

"Because she was the one who tried to poison you."

"But I'm still alive."

"..." Cheng Yu did not continue, nor did she leave. She only remained waiting in the rafters for what I would say next.

Even if she doesn't say anything, I know what she is thinking.

"Cheng Yu, I can't kill her." I said as I lay on the bed and gazed at the dots of light from the candles in the room. "She came to kill me because of the hatred I'm drawing to myself so she has a legitimate reason to kill me."

"Hai~~" What a rare phenomenon, Cheng Yu actually sighed. "So in the end, it's my lord's fault? Why do you have to make yourself out to be a tyrant?"

Cheng Yu could not understand, but I have not shared my thoughts with her either.

Tyrant... Huh. Indeed, my public image is that of a cunning and evil Cao Cao.

But it is because of this that Emperor Xian of Han's incompetency has been overlooked by the people. This way, history will only remember a despotic Cao Cao and a pitiful Emperor Xian of Han who was unable to show his talent. That much is enough.

All this, I have never shared with anyone else.

"... Who knows?"

"My lord!" Cheng Yu once again acted uncharacteristically as she exclaimed anxiously at my ambiguous words. Looks like she's genuinely worried about my future standing.

"Maa maa, I have my own considerations." But this is my own fight, and the burden is mine, and only mine, to bear.

"... But this can't have been Ji Ping alone, there must be people behind her who harbour ill will against my lord."

"Well then, who do you think they are?" As for what I think, it's definitely Dong Cheng's faction.

"It's definitely the group of nobles led by State Uncle."

As expected, my guess was right. Every Court session, he always avoids my gaze. In the rare times that he does meet my eyes, his eyes are always red. ... Maa, maybe he's just infatuated with me.

And besides...

"That's not just it right? They started moving when Ma Teng of West Liang came to Court, and Yuan Shao and Liu Biao have bolstered their garrisons at Dong commandery and Runan." I said as I recalled the various happenings recently and highlighted anything that seemed suspicious. "All this probably has some connection to Dong Cheng's plot."

"So my lord has already investigated huh?" Cheng Yu said moodily, and seemed surprised at how calm I was. "In any case, what we have to do now is to

quickly eliminate them, or there will be disastrous consequences in future.”

Un... Indeed.

But if this problem were to be handed to Xuan De, how would he resolve it?

... Perhaps.

“... Perhaps,” I said as I fiddled with a bamboo scroll nearby and a ‘礼’ on the scroll happened to catch my eye. “We should invite them for a banquet.”

(TL: 礼 can mean ceremony, manners, courtesy on its own.)

The next day after Court ended, I walked over to Wang Zi Fu and the rest, and invited them for a banquet at my house.

They seemed to have learnt of what happened last night from Ji Ping already and was thus, not surprised that I am still alive.

“I am truly grateful for the royal family to grace my banquet today with your attendance.” I said as I flashed them my signature confident smile at the 4 main members of the royal family with Wang Zi Fu as their leader. “But speaking of which, where is State Uncle Dong Cheng who was to be my guest of honour?”

Wang Zi Fu looked like he was stunned, and stammered a non-answer.

Even though it was a cool and breezy autumn, his head was glistening with sweat, and even his hands which were set on his thighs had soaked his clothes with sweat. As for the other 3, they weren’t much better off. If I were to describe them with one word... That’s right.

Spooked.

“Ah? Ah... St, State Uncle is ill.” One of them was finally able to squeeze a somewhat coherent reply after a long while.

Ill huh.

My eyes instinctively looked toward Feng Xiao to the side. Her long black hair covered the side of her face so I couldn’t see what her expression is like now. But from the way her shoulders are trembling slightly, she’s probably suppressing an urge to laugh now.

For this banquet, I got the opportunistic Feng Xiao to assist me instead of the

stoic Cheng Yu. Though I didn't explain much to her, she should understand my intent from the guests invited.

"Is that so, well then that can't be helped." I let it go for now and raised my wine cup at the 4 royals.

"Come, let us have our first cup." As I said so, I downed my cup in one go. Feng Xiao, who was weak with liquor, drank slowly and fanned her tongue as she was not good with the taste of hard liquor.

The wine I drink nowadays really is good though. When I think back to the wine I drank in Chen Liu when I first raised my army, it really is bland compared to the wine now.

Un?

"What's the matter with everyone? Why aren't you all drinking?" The 4 had difficult expressions as they stared at the cups they held before their mouths, and seemed unwilling to drink. Even the Wang Zi Fu, who was a famed alcoholic, only swallowed back his saliva as he smelt the fragrance of rice from the wine.

"Ah... All of us have had issues with our liver lately and have been advised not to drink."

"Advised not to drink?"

"Y, yes."

The one who replied shrank from just a simple follow-up question. When I saw how weak they were psychologically, I could only laugh helplessly.

"From my point of view, I don't think that's the reason why you all aren't drinking." Feng Xiao, who was always a prankster, couldn't resist and covered her evil smile with her sleeve as she continued. "You all, are afraid that this wine is poisoned right."

"How can that be! W, we wouldn't suspect Imperial Chancellor Cao of such a thing!"

... Feng Xiao didn't even say it was I who poisoned the wine right? You let it slip so quickly.

Seeing how anxious they are, Feng Xiao's guess was on the mark.

But if you think about it logically, how could I poison them so brazenly in a banquet that I'm hosting? If I were to kill someone, it would have to be in secret.

And besides, I and Guo Jia drank from the same jug of wine. If we're alright, what could possibly happen to you lot?

These 4 could no longer think logically, and were deep in fantastical delusions because of a guilty conscience.

But whatever the case, Feng Xiao gave me a good opening for me to begin our discussions proper.

"But every one of you royals should take care, for there are assassins in the palace recently." I said in a serious manner as I picked up my cup and passed it to a servant to refill it. The royals looked at me carefully, and seeing as they did not speak, I continued. "Perhaps you all don't know, but just yesterday, I was nearly poisoned."

"..." They continued to be silent, and their heads which were already hung low lowered even further.

"And so, I beseech all of you royals to be extra careful. Should you happen to meet with any mishap by some villain..." I stood up as I held my wine cup which was returned to me and was now filled with wine. "... Don't blame the evil villain for what happens then."

I raised my head and downed the contents in the cup in one go. When I lowered my head, the 4 royals were shivering as they kowtowed to me.

"Eh eh eh! What are you all doing?" I hurriedly got up and held up Wang Zi Fu and the rest, who were crying profusely.

"Aiya, why is everyone crying about?" I said as I patted his shoulders. "No need to worry for I, Cao Cao, shall endeavour to protect everyone with all of my power. As long as I still live, none of you will die."

I intentionally emphasised the last point, so that they would clearly understand what I meant. At least my effort wasn't wasted, as it seems like they understand as they bowed while crying which I quickly bowed in return. Thereafter, the banquet went on and I continued drinking but they left soon after, citing their liver as a reason.

Looks like they have given up for real... Hai, don't they suspect this as a plot to get them to lower their guard? If I had assassins lying in wait, then they would be dead for sure.

But I won't do that.

And this way, they will report back to State Uncle, and he should be more obedient from now on.

Personally, I do feel that this banquet ploy was a bit forceful but it worked well, so it's fine.

"... Is my lord serious about letting them go?" After I sent them out and came back, Feng Xiao came over shakily and asked.

... Is Feng Xiao tipsy already? She only drank one cup.

"Un, I'm not killing them." My headache was returning after drinking liquor. "State Uncle is plotting against me, not the Han, which they are loyal to. And the blood that flows in their veins is that of the Han, we can't afford to risk losing it."

I sighed as I said so. Similar cases would probably crop up in future, and it's tiring just thinking about them.

"Ah, Feng Xiao. Go and recruit some new talent over the next 2 days with Cheng Yu. There will probably be more people who will seek to retire in the times to come."

"... Un, got it." But Feng Xiao did not leave, and passed me a piece of silk with a smile. "This was a report that just came in, Zhang Xiu has surrendered."

"Keke, I didn't think it would be that easy..." I couldn't even hide my joy in my tone as I scanned through the silk after receiving it. "This is good. I'm actually rather lonely without Dian Wei by my side."

"Maa, Dian Wei is indeed a good general who is worth pranking."

Oi oi...

We broke into laughter, and then went to find Cheng Yu. As I entered the main hall, I picked up a bamboo scroll but could not concentrate on it as thoughts of Dian Wei who should be returning soon filled my mind.

When Dian Wei comes back, we should go have another round of the bronze cauldron with Xu Chu and the rest.

Chapter 9: Don't tell me this is the strike on Yuan Shu (1)

"Will my lord not be sleeping a little more?" Uncle Cheng's aged voice resounded from outside the tent and reverberated in my ears.

I couldn't help but cover my eyes irritatedly on hearing the old man's powerful voice.

"Shut up! I can't sleep anymore even if I wanted to with such a ruckus." My tightly shut eyes scrunched in tiredness and I yawned. I only slept for about 4 hours and had no intention of getting up.

Mornings in this season were slightly on the cold side and the autumn breeze that blew in from the gaps in the tent sent slight chills that made me readjust the blankets and my sleeping position to a more comfortable one.

Autumn days are a truly nice time to sleep in—

"Will my lord not be sleeping a little more?!~~~~" A voice that was slightly deeper than uncle Cheng's, but without any sort of seriousness, penetrated the tent and resounded in my heart.

This voice is definitely uncle Han's.

"Uncle Han, stop bothering me! Aren't I going to sleep a little more?" Because of uncle Cheng and uncle Han, my sleep had been mostly driven away and my mood was terrible now.

These 2 fellows... Are clearly here to wake me up but they had to do it by yelling out such roundabout words.

The more I thought about it, the more irritated I got. After a while, I was able to let it go and I pulled the blanket over and covered my face.

But I can't just go back to sleep peacefully.

When my opponents are Cheng Pu and Han Dang, I can't lower my guard and must maintain constant vigilance against any weird shouts that might come my way. And when they do, I will open my eyes and deliver them a good scolding.

“...”

After a long while, I did not hear any new shouts from the 2.

... Maa, I was probably thinking too much about it, time for more sleep—

“Will my lord not be sleeping a little more!!~~~~~”

Just when I had relaxed my guard completely, a thunderous roar swept through the tent, and nearly blew it as well as I away.

“Waa!” Having such a booming sound reverberating in my ear made my heart thump and I reflexively jumped out of bed and knelt on the ground. It took a long while for me to recover as cold sweat drenched my clothes and I gasped for breath.

“My lord, are you still going to sleep?” Uncle Han shouted alone this time, as though he was confirming that I was still alive.

“Uncle Cheng, you...”

Enough is enough!

“My lord, Lu Meng has brought her second platoon and is awaiting orders for a second wave of shouting.”

“I’m getting up right now!” I hurriedly got up and got changed on hearing these words.

Being bullied by these damned old men first thing in the morning is really vexing. My father’s subordinates are really one of a kind.

It’s been a few months since I’ve led father’s subordinates and troops. I’ve been through a good number of battles, small and big, and I’d thought I had reached a point where I could call myself a mature adult, but up till now, I still can’t kick the habit of sleeping late and sleeping in.

Maa, I knew that I wouldn’t have any more peaceful days the moment I heard news of father’s death.

After I had properly worn my clothes, I walked up to the entrance and spat out my tired breath and slapped my cheeks a few times before I stepped out.

“Greetings my lord!”

— Greetings my lord!~~~~~

Cheng Pu and Han Dang led the other troops in yelling out greetings to me. Because I was now outside of the tent, it was as if I could feel their voices hit my body like waves, which made my hair stand on end. But this was a good feeling.

For this expedition, I'd brought 12,000 troops which were divided into 4 brigades of 3,000 each, to be led by Cheng Pu, Han Dang, Lu Meng, and Taishi Ci.

"What time is it now?"

"My lord, it is now 07:45."

(TL: I'm normalising the time. They use ancient Chinese time units here.)

Only 07:45? The time we agreed on yesterday was 08:30... There's still almost an hour before that but you had to wake me up now.

"Un," I held back the resentment in my heart and turned back to see the energetic looks on the soldiers... Looks good, seems like the long journey hasn't impacted them too much. "Disperse for now. We regroup in 15 minutes."

"Will my lord not be sleeping a little more?"

"Uncle Cheng, you 2 are getting more irritating the older you 2 get." I stared at uncle Cheng with my sharp eyes, and though uncle Cheng was a hardened veteran, he still took a step back when met with my gaze. I shut my eyes and frowned as I sat on an empty stool nearby.

Cheng Pu and Han Dang both wore full plate armour, and kept long white beards, with battleworn and darkened faces that were proof of their experience in battle and life. By the way, Cheng Pu uses a steel serpent spear while Han Dang uses a bow and a sword. Both are brave men and are highly skilled in martial arts.

When father was still around, I didn't have too much of an impression of the 2 of them. So the time I have actually spent with them is only these past few months.

For me, these old generals who served my father are really reliable to a fault.

They would always try and stop me from drinking, banquets, late nights; and cite health and financial reasons for doing so, though in the end I would always

get my way anyway.

“My lord, I don’t want to say this.” Uncle Cheng said as he sighed. “But you really have to cut this habit of staying late of yours. It can get in the way of accomplishing things.”

As expected, the nagging continues even when we are just a few minutes before stepping on the battlefield.

“Maa, Liu Yu Zhou was here last night so how could I have gotten a good night’s sleep?” I yawned as I said so.

“When Lord Liu Bei came, it was already late in the night, weren’t you still awake then?”

“Wu...” I don’t even need to ask, Taishi Ci must have been the one who told these 2. That Taishi Co is really a worrywart.

“I, it’s all under control.”

“...” Uncle Cheng and uncle Han stared at me silently, which I returned with my eyes that were partially hidden under my fringe. After a long while like this, uncle Han finally sighed helplessly. “Maa, as a lord, you have a lot of things you need to do, so you can take your time in kicking that habit.”

I guess this is uncle Cheng giving me some leeway?

“I got it.” I replied as I got up. “I’ll be looking about.”

“My lord, if you want to go to the toilet, you can just say so. Nobody will say anything about it.”

“Uncle Hn!” I pulled out my sword and slashed at uncle Han’s neck as I turned around but uncle Han took a step to the left instantly and my sword landed on thin air. “Don’t vilify me, I really am going on an inspection.”

“But my lord, it really is best if you have a go first. It’s important for your metabolism after all.”

These old men are really getting on my nerves. They really are getting more improper the older they get.

I gave a ‘hmp’ in reply and walked off toward the main camp without paying

them any more heed.

As I walked over, I saw that everyone was busy with packing and getting ready and some were so busy that they didn't even notice me. Personally, I'm not the kind who cares about formalities so I didn't bother them and walked about alone.

As I walked, I stretched my stiff body and hoped I could relax my nerves as soon as possible.

"Hu~~" I tried to expel my nervousness outside of my system with my exhalation. Though I'd said I was going on an inspection, my true intent was to calm my nerves.

Ever since I've become a feudal lord, I've never had the time to adjust my feelings or adapt to the surroundings, nor has anyone given me a chance to back out. All that was left, was to accept everything.

Honestly, I've been really exhausted these few months, and now I know how hard it is for father all this while. A month ago, I toyed with the idea of giving up my position but then what would happen to my little sister? I can't possibly throw this to her. As the older sister, I should and must bear this burden.

Of course, ever since I've become a feudal lord, I've learnt many things I've never known before and have grown a fair bit as a person.

There has been good and bad to being a feudal lord, but I don't regret my decision— This is, how I feel about the past few months.

"Un?"

I was now in a certain section of the encampment, and saw 2 suspicious figures lurking about in a hidden area.

"Oi!" I shouted at them, and their shoulders trembled when they heard me. ... There's definitely something going on. "What are you lot doing over there?"

As I said so, I made my way to where they were. Those 2 neither turned their heads nor did they reply, as though they'd never heard what I said.

This is weird...

Just then, I'd walked pretty close, and was about to grab their shoulders. "Oi,

you 2—”

— *Sou*

The sound of something cutting through air rang out, and I instinctively shifted my center of gravity and leaned my head back. In the next instant, a glistening blade swept past the tip of my nose.

After dodging this blow, I frantically backed up. What the heck is going on?!

As I looked back, the 2 were now wielding their broadswords with bloodlust in their eyes.

“Oi, what do you 2 think you’re doing?”

“Sun Ce! You’re finished!”

“We just sent out a message, and our lord’s troops will be here soon!” The 2 then erupted into laughter, before charging at me with full force as their pupils shrank into a dot.

Un? The uniform that these 2 are wearing isn’t mine... It’s Yuan Shu’s! What’s going on? Do we have traitors in our midst?

This was something truly unexpected...

“...” I picked an ordinary wooden spear from a nearby weapons rack and got my stance ready.

“Die!” The 2 lifted their broadswords when they were about 10 paces away as they prepared to slash down at me.

I read the trajectories and calmly took a step back. These broadswords were heavy, and if they missed the first blow, things would be very bad for them.

And that is what happened. While their broadswords were not drawn back, I seized the opportunity and slammed the wooden spear in their faces— A crisp sound rang out— And the 2 fell to the ground unconscious.

I did show them mercy, and didn’t smash their brains out. If it were my little sister, she would probably break some bones even if she were barehanded.

I tossed the spear to the side and realised that something was amiss when I checked my surroundings.

Where was everyone else?

This section which should have about 300 people was not devoid of people.

Speaking of which, this section... Wasn't it formed by surrendered troops from Yuan Shu's army from a few months back?

"My lord!!!" Just then, uncle Cheng ran towards me with a bloodied serpent spear.

... I hope it's not too bad,

"What happened?" I frowned and prepared myself for the bad news that would soon come from uncle Cheng.

"A portion of the army mutinied! This is probably caused by surrendered troops from Yuan Shu's army!"

Damn it! I shouldn't have drafted them in.

"My lord!!" Before I could react to this, another voice rang out.

"Un?"

From not too far off, uncle Han came running over as well. "Yuan Shu's main army has left the city, and seems to be heading in this direction."

Kuh... When it rains, it pours huh.

But what should we do now?

"My lord, what do we do now?"

"..."

But I'm the lord now, and I have no right to ask others what to do.

I'm the commander of this army who decides what we do and so I must bear the responsibility of leading everyone.

"We clean up the mutinied troops first, and leave preparation of our defenses to Lu Meng and Taishi Ci." I yelled as I walked with clenched fists. "Bring me my silver spear."

Before long, I could hear the sounds of slaughter.

"Come, let us go that way."

Uncle Cheng threw the silver spear over and I received it with one hand and spun it a few times before I began running.

“What about Yuan Shu’s army?” Uncle Cheng asked as he ran up.

“Wake up Gong Jin for me! Let her handle that!”

The battle has begun.

“Lord Zhou Yu! Please wake up quick.”

Just as I was having a good sleep, a corporal came running in and pushed my back.

“Un? ... Let me sleep a while more, I only had 2 hours of sleep~~~~” I said, gauging the time from the angle of sunlight which shone into the tent from a gap.

Last night, I was hard at work reading books till dawn and only just fell asleep not too long ago.

“Aiya~~ Can you please wake up quick! Something’s happened!”

“Aiya!! You bastard, can you not touch my breasts?”

“How can I tell where your back ends and where your breasts start when your breasts are so tiny?!”

Ah, I think I heard my temple vein tearing.

“... Troops, give this fellow 20 paddles.”

—- Sounds of paddling

“Ah!!!!”

I really couldn’t continue sleeping after hearing the cries from outside the tent, and sat on the bed rubbing my eyes after I got up and changed.

Alright, let’s see what the situation is like now.

There are sounds of a fight going on outside the tent, but the scale doesn’t seem too big. From the gaps in the tent, everyone seems to be wearing the same uniform, no, some are wearing Yuan Shu’s uniform. ... Un, looks like surrendered troops from Yuan Shu’s army have mutinied.

There are faint tremors from the tent, but it isn't from the fighting outside. That means there is a large force making its way here and fast. ... So Yuan Shu has left the city and plans to defeat us from both within and without.

Un... What should we do now?

If we can stop Yuan Shu before she reaches the main encampment...

But with what? There shouldn't be much forces I can move from here now that there's a mutiny to deal with.

... I think I heard something last night while I was reading... Some other army sent to attack Yuan Shu? Who could it be? ... Probably Cao Cao's army since they also participated in the siege of Wan city.

The noise seemed to be more concentrated on the west side of the forest, so they should be there...

Maa, looks like I'll have to go and ask for help.

"Troops, ready my horse."

Chapter 10: Don't tell me this is the strike on Yuan Shu (2)

The sky was starting to brighten up, and the subordinate generals who were on alert were debriefed and returned to their tents thereafter. As for the rest of us, nobody had the mood to sleep with a battle upon us and were afraid of oversleeping. And so we gathered about a bonfire as we awaited the coming of dawn.

And so, we sat there for about 4 hours.

"My lord, won't you all catch some sleep?" Zhang Liao, who had returned ahead of us back to camp, had woken up early and was worried when she saw how tired we looked.

"It's a little late to be thinking about that." I said and then looked at the small, nodding body that was leaning against me and said, "Yi De, if you're tired, go and sleep for a bit in the tent."

Yi De was truly exhausted but she still shook her head with an 'Un~~'. Her small hands that were clinging on to my sleeve tightened their grip out of fear that she would be forcefully put to bed.

Eh ah~~~ You're digging into my flesh!!

It really hurt, but when I saw Yi De's peaceful sleeping face, I couldn't bear to pry her away and could only smile helplessly.

But thanks to Yi De's pinches, my tiredness has been mostly driven away.

"What's the time now?" I asked as I looked at the eastern sky where the sun had begun rising from.

I don't know if it's from anticipation or nervousness, but I've been asking this question quite a lot since we came back to camp. I keep getting the feeling that it doesn't feel real if I don't ask.

"It's going to be 08:00 soon." Feng Xian said as she looked at her water clock by her feet.

So we have another half hour before we launch our strike?

“Zhang Liao, wake everyone up. We’ll get moving once we have packed up.”

“Un.” Zhang Liao grunted in reply and got up before quickly passing through the entire encampment... You could have just spread the word using the lower ranked officers.

My easiness surged forth once more as I saw the soldiers slowly coming out of their tents.

The cool autumn breeze in the morning suddenly felt cold to the bone. My hands felt ice-cold, and my heart seemed to feel like it was engulfed by fire and ice. I tried breathing in and out to calm myself down but I ended up coughing instead.

... I wonder how it’s like on Sun Ce’s side? Are they ready?

Maa, they’re definitely better than the me who is utterly clueless and lost.

“My lord, you must take care of yourself.” “We just heard of what happened from Lord Zhang Liao, you came back just a few hours ago right.” “Staying up all night just before battle and getting this tired isn’t good.”

“Ah, morning. You 3 have woken up huh.” The Xu state 3 were wearing their usual clothing and seemed a bit withdrawn from the chilly morning. From their faces, they didn’t seem like they have fully woken up yet and only nodded at my greeting after a moment.

“But it is indeed difficult without sleep.” Yun Chang leaned her head back and covered her mouth as she gave a big yawn which brought tears to her eyes. “I’ll go and wash my face to freshen up.”

“Ah, I’ll go too.” Feng Xian, who also had her eyes half-closed, said so as she got up and carefully placed the furball on her legs onto the stool. “Ah~~~ I really envy you Red Hare~~~”

“”””We’ll go as well.”””” The Xu state 3 raised their hands and followed after Feng Xian.

Red Hare had not woken up yet, and was curled up in a ball such that you couldn’t even tell where its head was.

On various levels, the most fortunate of us all is probably Red Hare. A carefree life without worries, and it doesn't even have to think about returning to its original time.

"Yi De, you should wake up now." I shook my shoulders gently to wake up Yi De. "We're leaving soon, so you should go and wash your face."

"Un~~~ ... Yes~~~" It took a while before Yi De understood what I said as she sat up and loosened her grip on my sleeve but didn't look like she was going to stand up just yet.

Hu~~~ Blood is finally flowing in my arm. If I pulled back my sleeve now, I would probably see a big bruise. But I'm not going to do that, I'm not brave enough.

"Big brother!!"

Un?

Yun Chang who had just left to wash her face was now walking over quickly. She probably isn't done washing her face yet seeing as there are still beads of water on her face and hair. Her smooth white face seemed even more luscious after being soaked with water and the water droplets made her dark red hair dazzling in the morning light, making her look even more stunningly beautiful than she usually was.

"What's the matter? Why are you so anxious?"

Yun Chang walked up to where I was and folded her arms at her chest with a solemn expression on her. She stared at me with a sharp glance and then looked at the forest. "I'm not sure if it's my nerves or something else, but I sense a commotion coming from the other side of the forest."

"Commotion?" I asked as I turned to look at the forest. "... I don't feel anything?"

Could something have happened with Sun Ce? But they're over a mile off from here, how could sounds from there travel here?

"No, there is indeed something." Feng Xian said as she wiped her face with a cloth and walked over. "I smell the familiar scent of blood and the air currents feel chaotic."

“Un? ... Why don’t I feel anything?”

Maa, because you’re Yi De.

But is this what they call a sixth sense? As expected of extraordinary individuals. An ordinary person like myself cannot hope to perceive what they have sensed.

“Since both of you say so, then it can’t be wrong.” I said as I walked over to the outskirts of the forest and looked inside. I still saw nothing, and turned around as I gave up and said. “There’s still some time before our joint strike, let’s send some scouts to have a look—”

—- Move away!!!!

Ah? I think I heard something. Was it a horse?

“Big brother, danger!” Yi De’s tender voice rang out from my right, and before I could react, she had dived at me and we landed to the side.

Ouch!!

— *Neigh~~~~*

Before I could complain about the pain, a horse’s neigh could be heard as a horse with a yellow mane jumped out of the forest and landed right where I was standing before.

— Xu!

After a girl gave a command, the horse stopped neighing.

“ ... ”

I was rendered speechless by this sudden scene and I soon realised that if it weren’t for Yi De’s quick thinking, I would have been trampled into minced meat by now.

“Big brother, big brother, are you injured anywhere?” Yi De, who was lying on top of me asked concernedly.

At this time, her face was just a minute distance away from mine, and her small lips and breasts seemed exceptionally charming from up close and I didn’t know where to look.

What surprised me more was how light she felt despite her whole body being on top of me. It was even more surprising given the sheer amount of food she usually eats.

“Un, I’m alright.” I smiled as I stroked Yi De’s head. “Thank you, Yi De.”

Yi De gave a silly ‘hehehe’ as I stroked her head.

Ah... My back got some damage, it will probably hurt for several days.

“Who are you!” Hearing Yun Chang’s roar, I got up and saw that Yun Chang and Feng Xian were armed and ready, and there were some soldiers which had formed a surround.

Because I was outside of the surround, I could not see the rider.

“Ah, may I ask if this is the encampment of the Cao army?” An unfamiliar voice that belonged to a girl came from the surround, and seemed like it belonged to the rider.

“... So what if we are?” Yun Chang replied, not lowering her guard in the least.

“Then that’s good.” The voice went silent for a moment. “From how quickly you gathered troops... You all brought about 10,000 or so right?”

“H, how did you know?”

... Looks like it’s someone extraordinary again. As I thought so, I dusted the soil off me, straightened my clothing and made my way through the surround.

“Big brother?”

“Ah, big brother, don’t come over. We don’t know who that person is yet.” Yun Chang warned me as she saw me coming over.

“Put down your weapons, everyone. If we don’t know who she is, all we have to do is ask.” I said as I finally made my way in.

A disposition that is both flexible and resolute— That was my first impression of her.

She wasn’t tall, but had an aura that made people unable to ignore her. Beneath her curvy eyebrows were a pair of deep set eyes that seemed to be brimming with intelligence. A short braid hung at the back of her head and if she

let her hair down, her hair should probably extend to just her shoulders. Overall, she looked like an energetic and lively young girl. With her regrettable breasts, if she doesn't speak, one might mistake her for a boy.

After sizing her up, I quickly bowed before introducing myself. "I am Liu Bei Liu Xuan De, and I am here with troops to launch a strike on Yuan Shu, may I ask who you are..."

"Ah, apologies for my rudeness." She didn't seem apologetic at all, nor did she bother with any niceties. "I'm Bo Fu's strategist— Zhou Yu Zhou Gong Jin."

!!!

"Zhou, Zhou Yu!"

"That's me... Is there anything amiss?"

"No, it's nothing." I smiled to feign calm and cover up for my exclamation.

She wouldn't understand why I was so surprised, no matter how smart she is.

"Yun Chang, you can lower your guard. She is indeed a strategist of Sun Ce's."

"... Since big brother says so, then—" Yun Chang waved her hand, and the soldiers went back to what they were doing before.

"But there must be something going on for Sun Ce's subordinate to come here at this time." Feng Xian said as she walked over.

For some reason, Zhou Yu looked very vexed at Feng Xian's words and rubbed her head. "Maa, something did indeed happen." Zhou Yu said calmly, as though nothing much had happened. "I'll explain it as simply as I can."

"Alright, we understand what happened." After hearing Zhou Yu's summary, I took a deep breath and exhaled weakly.

All of us, including Zhou Yu, were now having breakfast in the main tent as we listened to Zhou Yu.

"So that is to say, your side is embroiled in great danger?" Yi De said as she ate porridge.

"Un, to put it even more simply, that's the case." Zhou Yu had a bowl of porridge in her hands as well. "Yuan Shu's army has now left the city and is now

currently making a beeline for our encampment.”

A mutiny... Huh. It's gotten very troublesome all of a sudden. I'm not sure how to deal with this. But in such a situation, the first thing we should do is to send help right?

(My lord...) Gong You, who was standing behind me with the other 2 as always, whispered to me.

I looked at Zhou Yu who was engrossed with eating and leaned my head back to listen to what Gong You had to say.

When they saw this, the Xu state 3 also bent forward and whispered into my ear.

Ah... Having these 3 whisper into my ear is... I feel soft all over.

“Now that Lord Sun Ce's camp is about to be under attack, Shouchun city should be relatively empty.” “Since they did not leave any defenses, they should not have noticed us yet, and it is an opportune time to attack the city.” “Even if Yuan Shu learns of our attack on Shouchun city, her forces will be entangled with Lord Sun Ce's and she should not be able to come back so easily.”

Zi Zhong's eyes were lit up, and xiao Yong's eyebrows were raised while Gong You's expression was the same as usual. Though their expressions were different, they probably thought the same thing, that I shouldn't give up this hard-to-come-by chance.

“But...” Is this really okay? I feel like an opportunistic looter, and it feels like Sun Ce is a sacrificial pawn of mine.

Sun Ce's forces number about 10,000 or so and will probably dip below that significantly after the mutiny. It will be difficult for her to face off against Yuan Shu's main army.

I couldn't decide, and cold sweat streamed down my face as I felt everyone's stares on me.

“Oh right, I haven't said my intention for coming here yet.” Just as I was struggling internally, Zhou Yu set down her bowl and wiped her mouth roughly as she said. “I'm here to tell you all to attack the city immediately.”

“Eh?” Zhou Yu’s sudden words made me even more confused. “Bu, but your side is...”

“When you consider the big picture, attacking the city first is the right choice. With a 10,000 strong force, you can easily take an almost empty city.” Zhou Yu no longer looked irritated as before and was now serious. “From how Yuan Shu is, even if you attack the city, she won’t turn her troops back as she always overestimates herself.”

... Looks like she really is here to persuade us to attack the city.

“But what about you all? Your troops are still locked in internal conflict, and you have to deal with Yuan Shu’s main force.”

“Un, we’ll probably lose more than half of our troops.” Zhou Yu said as she looked at my pained expression. “But it is precisely because of this that Lord Liu Bei should quickly siege the city.”

“...”

Indeed, under such circumstances, taking the city is the best possible choice. But.

Sun Ce was presently still fighting alone.

A girl slightly younger than me is facing a much stronger enemy alone.

Even if you ask me to consider the big picture, there’s no way I can throw Sun Ce aside and attack the city right?

I looked at the others. Yun Chang and Zhang Liao seemed to be saying ‘up to you’ with their eyes, Feng Xian seemed like she didn’t mind either way while Yi De wasn’t even looking at me and was busy eating.

“... I,” I made my decision and turned to look at the 3 before I looked at Zhou Yu resolutely. “I think we’re still going to save Sun Ce.”

“Haa?!” Zhou Yu did not expect my answer at all as she exclaimed with raised eyebrows and slammed the table. “But why? I’m here to tell you to attack the city. It’s the better choice.”

“Perhaps so, but I’m worried about Sun Ce more than I’m eager to take the

city.' I smiled as I said childish words,

"Un, this is our lord." Zhang Liao said something that I couldn't tell was praise or criticism.

"Un." "Though it's not the best plan, I have no objections." "What a waste~~"

Zhou Yu, on the other hand, was unsatisfied. "Lord Liu Bei, I go way back with Bo Fu. She's not some weakling you need to be worried about."

"Perhaps so, but when met with a far stronger enemy, anyone would want someone to depend on. Much less Lord Sun Ce, who has only become a feudal lord for all of 3 months." I stood up and bowed. "In any case, I apologise but I cannot agree to your suggestion. Gong You, you 3 get everyone to pack up. We're not sieging the city, and we'll head for Lord Sun Ce's camp in a while."

The 3 nodded and the others got up as well.

"I didn't think that someone would be able to see through my lord's weaker side from just one meeting."

"No matter how brave and capable she is, she's just a 16 year old girl."

"Un, you can ignore my suggestion earlier then." Zhou Yu got up, and wore a smile on her face.

"Big brother, we'll be making our preparations then." Yun Chang said, and made to leave.

"Wait." Just then, Zhou Yu stopped them and turned towards them. "Don't be so hasty, listen to my plan on capturing Yuan Shu alive first."

Part 1

TL: Part 1 of 2, chapter was way too long...

Yuan Shu POV

“Ahahaha~~~ Everyone, charge!!!” I swung the reins in my hands fervently as I felt on top of the world.

How exciting is this! Wearing a royal robe and leading my troops out on an expedition, how cool is this!! This is what it means to be a monarch, this is what it means to be royalty~~~



“My lord, please stop shouting... All the soldiers are looking and it’s really embarrassing for you to act like that~” An administrative official to my left who wore plain clothing and tied her long black hair back which revealed her big forehead said to me.

Why is this fellow acting all proper for.

“Maa... Why don’t we have everyone advance by dog paddling, seems like it would be great fun!”

“Don’t listen to our lord’s orders everyone! Just run normally.” The female warrior on the right superseded my order as though it were something totally

normal.

She wore golden yellow unfashionable plate armour and her breastplate was so protruding that it made me mad. She's already a 20-something old hag, why is she still wearing something so seductive?

"Speaking of which, you 2 should stop calling me lord. It's time you called me queen."

"Haa.... But then~~" The female warrior didn't continue and looked at the female administrative official.

"That's right, queen is a bit..." The female administrative official laughed dryly before continuing. "That way of addressing is a little embarrassing."

Temple vein bursting No matter how big-hearted I am, I can't allow someone to bully me like that. "Oi!! Yan Xiang, Ji Ling! How dare you 2 do this to me!! I'll punish you 2!"

I swung my big sleeves at these 2. It took quite a bit of effort to do so, but it relieved quite a bit of my anger each time.

"Oi oi! My lord, your sleeves are big and heavy, don't swing them about like that!" Ji Ling received quite a few blows and was angry after a few of them hit her face.

"My lord, I never approved of you declaring yourself Emperor to begin with, but where did you get such a cumbersome set of clothing?" Yan Xiang said as she shielded her forehead.

"What, how has my clothing offended you? I spent good money on this, I won't allow you 2 to insult it." I hugged my clothing tightly as though it were my baby while Ji Ling showed a hateful expression.

Hmph! These people don't know how this set of clothing is laced and studded with gold and silver and how marvelous it is. How could any other clothing compare to it? For the sake of procuring this, do they know how much I have had to fleece the people... I have had to put in so much effort to raise funds for it?

I'm the Emperor, not one of those ordinary people.

“But my lord, the weight from your clothing puts a greater burden on the horses. Given that we are also at the head of the army, this greatly impacts the speed at which we can advance and hence, delays the time at which we can reach Sun Ce’s encampment.”

“So longwinded! Big forehead!”

“Wh! What?! How could my lord say that of me!” She looked devastated, looks like I stepped on a landmine. *Shiku...*

You’re already an adult, why are you crying over this?

Really, why are the people beside me always such wet blankets at my happiest times.

Hai, my good mood is totally gone.

Shiku...

“Lord Yan Xiang, don’t cry. Don’t you understand how our lord is by now?”

Ji Ling, what are you trying to say?

I wanted to give them a good scolding but I started hating myself for some reason after seeing how pitiful Yan Xiang looked.

... Maa, maa, perhaps I was indeed a little overboard just now.

“Yan Xiang, don’t worry about such small issues. That internal chaos is more than what that Sun Ce can handle.” I said, trying to change the topic and improve the situation. “You did well this time, Yan Xiang. I’ll praise you for this.”

(TL: Yuan Shu addresses herself as 本小姐 which is something like this young mistress, which sounds kind of retarded in English, as does most forms of self-address in other languages.)

I’d wanted to stretch my hand out to pat her head but my royal robe, and my height, stopped me from doing so.

“Eh?” Yan Xiang, whose tears were about to stream down, looked at me with surprise before frantically waving her hands. ... Servants really are fun to toy with. “Maa, Sun Ce is too inexperienced after all. Employing enemy troops is a precarious move to begin with, but I didn’t think that she didn’t even change the

2 leading generals for the 2 thousand troops she took in. How could we not exploit such a good opportunity?”

Un, I don't quite get what you just said, but it sounds very impressive.

“But,” Ji Ling, however, frowned at Yan Xiang's words. “Being ambushed would be disastrous for us now that we're bringing our 20,000 strong troops on a fast march.”

Yan Xiang gave a wry smile as she sighed. “How could a great general such as yourself say such a thing. Just a moment ago, I gave a good scolding to a low ranked general who said these exact same words to me.” Yan Xiang paused, and pointed at the surroundings which were filled with both tall stout trees and short thinner trees. “We're doing a fast march through the forests. Though our numbers are great, it will be difficult to figure out which route we will take ahead of time.”

“In the case of an ambush, I highly doubt there is a proper place to ambush from given the environment. Moreover, who is there who could ambush us? Sun Ce's troops are stymied for now and are unable to act quickly enough.”

“Un, what Lord Yan Xiang says makes sense.”

It always angers me how these 2 fellows always talk about things I can't quite understand in front of me.

“Oi! You're only my servants so stop chatting and slacking about already you 2.” I yelled out at them moodily. This move has always been effective with the 2 of them as they shut up immediately. “How much longer until we reach Sun Ce's encampment huh?”

“Ah, we should be seeing Sun Ce's main camp soon.” Yan Xiang said as she calmly hooked her hair behind her ear. “When we reach there, all we need to do is charge out from the forest and victory will be ours.”

Un un, I see I see.

I'd thought that Sun Ce was someone impressive but who knew she would fall so easily.

But the great me, Yuan Shu Yuan Gong Lu, has a strong army and a wealth of

supplies. Now that I have the Jade Seal, I have followed the will of the people and assumed the position of Emperor. With Heaven on my side, how could I not easily achieve victory in the first battle I'm personally leading?

We'll see if Cao Cao and big sister dares to belittle me anymore after I defeat Sun Ce.

Just as I was thinking about what was going to happen after, the sounds of violence and battle could be heard, looks like we are indeed—

“Everyone halt!!”

“Waa!~”

What the heck was Ji Ling thinking, giving the order to halt all of a sudden. It gave me such a fright I held on to the reins too tightly and nearly fell to the ground from the horse's movements.

“Ji Ling are you crazy!! What is it you're...”

“Be quiet my lord!” How audacious... She actually ordered me! “Look over there—”

Un?

I looked unwillingly in the direction Ji Ling pointed at. For some reason, the mist that hung about the forest, not only that patch of forest, was exceptionally thick.

Looking out from afar, about a hundred paces or so, I could only see short shrubs and soil dunes.

“I can't see any...”

“...” Ji Ling put her index finger at her mouth and did a soft 'sh' before shouting at the mist. “I am Yuan Shu's General Ji Ling, who goes there that hides in the dark and dares not report their name??”

...

Everything and anything became silent. Even I was affected by the atmosphere and couldn't speak. Everyone seemed to be waiting for an answer from the mist.

After a moment, a young girl's voice replied. “... I am Sun Ce's subordinate

general Cheng Pu Cheng De Mou, and I have come with 5,000 men to meet the Han traitor in battle under the orders of my lord.”

Along with the voice, a sole figure began to appear from within the mist as she walked out which gradually became clearer and we soon saw what she looked like.

The girl wore a rarely seen green coat armour and rode a bay horse. Her dark red, waist length hair was braided into a ponytail and she held a heavy-looking glaive with a dragon design. The glaive’s blade shimmered brightly and glaringly under the sunlight.

I couldn’t see her eyes clearly from where I was, but even so when I looked into them, they seemed to suck me in and when I regained my senses, my body was filled with a chill.

Shortly after she stepped out, many flags and figures appeared from the mist and just a rough count would tell you that they number more than 5,000.

Though I’d heard this name before, I’ve never seen Cheng Pu in person and I never thought that Cheng Pu was such an impressive person.

“Hou~~~” Ji Ling spoke relaxedly but her face was a murderous expression that seemed like that of a demon god.

“But that’s weird, how could the Sun Ce army find enough spare troops to put together an interception force?” Yan Xiang muttered as sweat streamed down her face at the unforeseen circumstances before her. “... No, this has to be false. This person definitely does not have 5,000 behind her. My lord, if you order 3,000 men to charge at the mist, we can dispel their schemes. And then, all we need to do is continue on to Sun Ce’s camp...”

“Un? Could Lord Yuan Shu be intending on escaping? To think a descendent of the family that has held prime appointments in the Imperial Court for 4 generations would not dare cross swords with me.” Cheng Pu said mockingly after seeing our side speak quietly.

(TL: The Yuan family was extremely prestigious, wealthy and influential. Each of the 4 patriarchs preceding this generation held 1 of 3 apex Imperial Court positions.)

“What did you say?!”

“Don’t take the bait, my lord!” Yan Xiang said as she grabbed my shoulder.

“Yan Xiang, no more words!” I flung my sleeve and swiped Yan Xiang’s hand off.

“My lord!”

No matter what Yan Xiang says, I can’t hear anything anymore. If it was anything else, I might have tried to endure it but I won’t allow anyone to insult my forebears.

“Alright, I understand. We’ll have a fair and proper battle then.” I looked at Ji Ling who nodded and took her helmet from a subordinate. “As per the rules of engagement, we’ll begin with a duel. Ji Ling~”

“Ji Ling hears and obeys. Jia—”

(TL: Jia is what the ancient Chinese used to command horses to begin galloping.)

Ji Ling pulled the reins on her horse and charged at Cheng Pu.

Ji Ling POV

“Yaa!!!”

“...”

— A crisp *dang* rang out. That was the sound that came from the clash between my trident and Cheng Pu’s Green Dragon Blade.

Wu! Such great strength!

After an introductory blow to test each other’s strength, we turned our horses and faced each other once more.

Kuh... This is bad.

My heart was thumping hard from nervousness and I hurriedly used my left arm to support my trembling right arm.

I was thinking that I could finish Cheng Pu with the first blow but who knew that my arm would be numbed by her.

It was only one blow but her strength was so monstrous that I couldn't raise my main arm.

"..." Cheng Pu was perfectly calm, as though the blow I dealt her had not affected her in the least.

I forced myself to show a calm expression and switched the trident to my left hand which I was not used to.

Right here and now, I have to face her.

"Ya~~~~~" I pulled on the reins as I yelled out and charged at Cheng Pu.

Cheng Pu wordlessly charged forth and held her weapon with both hands above her head. Looks like she wants to cleave down with all her strength.

I hurriedly raised my spear with both hands to block it—

No! My right hand can't move.

Just as I was brimming with anxiousness, Cheng Pu was right before me, and I could only raise my trident with one arm and hope that I can block it somehow.

"..." She swung down her weapon wordlessly and landed directly on my trident.

"Uwa!" I couldn't help but let an embarrassing cry at the sheer strength I felt. The power from the swing was so great I was pressed down flat on my horse.

It's over, I have no way to defend myself!

With just one slice, I'll—

Just as I was ready to give up, the power that was pressing down on me shifted and I could hear the sound of horse hooves from the side. I got up with great difficulty and saw that Cheng Pu was now 10 paces away from me and had readied her stance for the next bout.

... That bastard, she actually showed me mercy during a warrior's duel!

(TL: In the original, Guan Yu and Ji Ling dueled to a draw.)

At this point, my hands were completely numb and if I loosened my grip even a little, the trident would slip off.

“...”

“Haa... Haa...” I’m so exhausted. It feels like I have no strength left in my body. I probably can’t even do a simple stab properly at this point.

I’m already reduced to such a pathetic state even though it’s only been 2 rounds. I must acknowledge the sheer difference in strength between us.

No good, my mood has completely relaxed. Have I given up already?

Maa, it doesn’t matter. We have an absolute advantage with our numerical superiority. At the very most, our troop morale will drop a little.

Right now, all I want is to see my lord’s face.

My eyes are getting itchy from sweat, and it feels like I’ll probably cry if I’m not careful.

I, Ji Ling, have fought battles from north to south, and though my lord is immature, she was worth dedicating my life to.

But at the very end, 20-something year old me can’t even hold off someone in her teens. What a farce.

... Un? Wait a minute.

Cheng Pu is in her teens?

... Impossible! Cheng Pu should be about the same age as Sun Jian!

I was perplexed at this conflict between what I saw and what I knew and turned to look at the troops in the mist instinctively.

I couldn’t see it clearly but these were definitely not Sun Ce’s troops. And emblazoned on the flags was a very clear ‘曹’.

So that’s it!!! This wasn’t Sun Ce’s army to begin with, it was Cao Cao’s army.

I’m not an administrative official so I can’t understand why the Cao army would want to conceal its identity. But I do know one thing, based on my gut, which was probably something that even an ordinary person could sense.

And it is with this sense that I faced the tiny Emperor sitting at the head of the army and yelled—

“Be careful my lord!”

Part 2

Yuan Shu POV

Kill!!!—

Ji Ling's shout was drowned out by several firecrackers that exploded around us. Immediately after that, cries for blood could be heard from all 4 directions and frightened me so much I covered my ears.

"We've been ambushed!! Generals go and lead your battalions! Personal Guard! Gather here and protect our lord!" Yan Xiang rattled off orders in quick succession.

Just then, a group of spearmen surrounded us. "My lord, be careful!"

An ambush? What happened?

I still hadn't regained my senses when I saw the troops led by Cheng Pu charge at me. I could only curl up in fear as I saw the cavalry pass me by, seeing their long spears nearly made my heart stop. And all around me were thunderous roars which reverberated about my body, so much so that I couldn't tell if it was the earth or I that was trembling.

My eyes saw everything but I saw nothing. My ears heard everything but I heard nothing. My clumsy, heavy royal robe made it hot and humid and it seemed like every sweat gland was furiously lumping sweat out.

I looked left and right listlessly.

I saw someone's blood spray on to another's face as cavalry and spearmen were embroiled in combat. Looking afar, all I could see was a scene of chaos.

This was my first time on the battlefield and my first time seeing such a scene.

Honestly, it was horrible.

Just an hour ago, the forest lost its tranquil. Just a few minutes ago, my troops became a scattered mob.

"The enemy's mobility is too strong. To think that they could wreck so much havoc with just a few thousand." Yan Xiang was frantically trying to command

the troops and generals around her, her hair flying in every which way. “Where are my 1,000-man generals?! 3,000-man generals? ... Damn it, all of them have been swept away by the cavalry. The only troops that are under our command are just a few hundred.”

“... Hu.” I felt better and calmed down as I watched the frantic Yan Xiang.

Good.

Good that Yan Xiang is still by my side, I don’t want to bear the responsibility for death and failure alone.

... Speaking of which, where is Ji Ling? Where did that Ji Ling fellow run to?

“Ji Ling? Ji Ling where are you?” My thoughts spilled out into my speech but no matter how loud my anxious coice was, there was no way it could penetrate the chaotic racket of the battlefield.

Could it be that in the first charge... No, impossible. She’s my number one general!

All I have to do is ask Yan Xiang. Though she isn’t very likeable, she always has a plan.

“Oi, Yan...” I looked toward Yan Xiang, who was completely occupied with commanding the troops and had no spare capacity whatsoever, and swallowed my words.

I searched any area that was visible from where I was with my eyes, in the hopes of finding Ji Ling somehow. However, my increasing frustration made it hard for me to concentrate on any one point and I was unable to recognise any face as my eyes swept left and right. Right now, I felt exactly as how I did when I did administrative work when I was distracted.

I really don’t get it, why do I have to care about her?! She’s just a servant!

Frustrating thoughts made me even more frustrated and I kept scolding Ji Ling in my mind. But even so, my eyes continued searching for her.

Now that I think about it, this is the first time I’m being so attached to a subordinate.

Speaking of which, Ji Ling has been with me since I was very little and I had

always treated her as my big sister... When did I begin to have this unreasonable attitude?

All of a sudden, the 3 rows of spearmen that stood in front of me were hit by another wave of cavalry and now only 1 was left.

“Waa~” The long spears scared the horse and it raised its hoof in front of me and gave me such a fright I hurriedly back away.

“My lord, it seems like they are concentrating their attacks on us noe.” Yan Xiang was now holding a sword in her hands. Its blade was soaked in blood which dripped down the edge. “It will be difficult for the other battalions to support us and I’m afraid that our personal guard won’t hold out long enough for the ambush to be decimated.”

A 20,000 strong force in my hands yet I am unable to command them. What a farce.

When I thought about this, I felt like laughing though the urge to cry was stronger.

But I can’t cry or laugh, because that would be too unbecoming. I am the descendent of a family which has held the 3 prime appointments in Imperial Court for 4 generations, and now I am the Emperor. No matter how perilous or how urgent things may get, I cannot act out.

“My lord!!!”

Un? I think I heard a familiar voice...

“My lord!!! Here!!”

I wiped my eyes with the slightly dirtied royal robe and looked toward where the sound came from.

There stood a female warrior wielding a trident and wearing unfashionable golden yellow plate armour, her breastplate protruding so much it made one mad. At this time, she was slashing at enemies while waving at and coming toward me whenever she could.

“Ji Ling?!” I wiped my eyes again, unable to believe what I just saw. I pushed Yan Xiang forcefully when I finally confirmed that it was her. “Yan Xiang, Yan

Xiang! Ji Ling is over there!”

After looking over when she heard the name, Yan Xiang heaved a sigh of relief. “Ji Ling really is Ji Ling huh.”

That’s right, she’s my number one general, how could she have died in the chaos so easily?

Ji Ling rode over slowly, and when she was in front of me, I saw that her hands were trembling.

“My lord, are you alright?”

“... Maa, maa, I’m alright.” Worry about yourself before worrying about others. “What were you doing Ji Ling? Where were you?”

Do you know how worried I was for you?

“Ah, I was swept away by the cavalry and then I made my way here by following the perimeter.” Ji Ling dismounted and knelt down on one knee before continuing. “Your servant deserves death for not being able to fulfill her duty.”

Death... Huh.

“... It’s fine as long as you’re alright.” I forcefully tightened my expression and raised my eyebrows as I said so.

“Eh?” Ji Ling raised her head in surprise and looked at me with an expression that was as if the way the reply I gave her frightened her.

“What are you ‘eh’-ing for? Your job now is to protect me right.” I couldn’t keep it up any longer and turned away so she wouldn’t see my weak side. “If you die, then the number of people who will protect falls by one no?”

“...” Ji Ling did not reply immediately and only gave a ‘acknowledged’ after a moment.

I could hear the joy from this fellow’s voice. As Emperor, I supposed it’s necessary to spoil your servants once in a while.

“Alright, the reunion ends here.” Yan Xiang clapped twice and I and Ji Ling looked at her. “Look my lord, the defenses on that side have become thin. The forces we can control are too few so I think leaving this place is for the best.”

I don't know what Yan Xiang means, but I think she's saying we can leave this place.

A 20,000 strong army rendered impotent after an interception and an ambush.

I'm sure this is due to luck.

"The troops that have followed are about less than 200." Yan Xiang reported after counting the exhausted soldiers at the back.

To think that I'm left with so few...

"Then what about the others? Are we just leaving them be?"

"I left a 100 men ahead of time who will handle the clean up. When they finish off the ambush, they will return to the city." Yan Xiang pressed her forehead and flung her soil-ridden hair back, revealing a refreshing and comical forehead.

"Speaking of which, Ji Ling, what was it about that person not being Cheng Pu?"

At this question, Ji Ling showed a perplexed look again. "Ah, you all saw it too right. Those flags clearly state that they are the Cao army. And from what I know, Cheng Pu should be over 30 years old, so that young girl can't be Cheng Pu."

"I didn't think that the Cao army would just appear out of nowhere... If I'd known, I would have sent out more scouts." Yan Xiang said some words that came a little too late. "Now that I think about it, if we hadn't bothered to deal with that girl, we wouldn't have revealed our tracks in the forest. I think that the ambush was prepared during Ji Ling's duel with that girl."

"Aiya, what's the point in saying this now?" I looked at the sun, and it felt like a good amount of time had passed. "After we return to the city, we are regrouping and counterattacking immediately!"

After sitting on the horse for half a day, my butt hurt quite a bit. The sweat from before made my underwear stick to my body and it was wet and humid. I felt a strong urge to strip my royal robe off.

"Speaking of which, there is one thing I don't understand..." Yan Xiang said as she rubbed her forehead, and looked ahead with uncertain eyes. "Why did the

ambush not start with arrows? If they did so, then we would have sustained a lot more damage.”

How will I know that?~~~ Maybe the enemy thinks that arrows are too heavy.

— We didn’t use arrows because we want to capture you alive of course.

A cold voice echoed in the forest.

The one who replied wasn’t me, nor was it Ji Ling.

“Everyone on guard!” Yan Xiang immediately ordered the troops who drew their weapons and readied themselves for battle.

“Who is it?!” Ji Ling raised her spear cautiously.

I tried to find where the sound came from but to no avail.

Just when I was naively hoping it was a delusion, a black figure slid down from the tree.

As the figure stepped out into the light, a female warrior holding a large halberd could be seen. The aura that emanated from her triggered alarm bells in my head.

“I am Lu Bu Lu Feng Xian, and I have been waiting for you all for some time now.” She said as she stuck the halberd into the ground, sending soil flying everywhere. When the soil landed, several rows of troops came crawling out of the shrubbery like magic and blocked our escape.

“Kuh, we fell for it.” Yan Xiang said with a despondent look. “Looks like the thin defenses back there were to lure us here huh.”

How could that be? ...

I shifted my eyes away from Yan Xiang and looked at the warrior once more who was looking at me and she said—

— Relax, I’m here to capture you alive.

Chapter 12: Don't tell me this is my encounter with Lu Su

TL: This is kind of like an intermission chapter but it's important as you can tell from the title that it's a character introduction chapter. One of the most cliché harem scenes happen in this chapter. Try guessing what it is.

Zhou Yu POV

"Achoo! ... Ah~~ My mucus is flowing out." I let out a big sneeze after my nose got affected from the dusty air.

Even though I only just recovered from a cold last week, now my delicate body is definitely going to fall ill again.

In this sort of weather where the cold winds buffet your body, any sweat that flows will quickly dry off. And because of physical activity, sweat will quickly stream out from your pores. It's no wonder that one will catch a cold by being subject to this.

At this moment, I was rushing toward our ambush point with Lord Zhang Fei, who was riding alongside me and was neither sweating nor did she look tired at all. In fact, she even seemed to be in high spirits.

"..."

"... Un? What are you looking at me for Lord Zhou Yu?"

"No, it's nothing." This short haired petite girl was even smaller than me but her body seemed to be more robust.

As I thought so, I took out some straw paper and brought it to my nose—
Xing~~~~

"Is Lord Zhou Yu not feeling well?"

Lord Zhang Fei's frivolous seeming tone might be her natural one but it's not something I can accept easily.

"Ke" I tossed the used straw paper away and lightly cleared my throat. "I'm

not bragging but I'm well known in Jiangdong as a distinguished woman of ability, and am both capable in handling administrative affairs and skilled in martial arts. So having a weak constitution is something understandable."

"Haa... I don't understand what you're trying to say at all." She said with a blank look, from which I couldn't tell if she really didn't understand or if she did not believe what I said.

"Maa, all that doesn't really matter... Back to the matter at hand, I really can't understand Lord Zhou Yu's scheme with my brain." She smiled helplessly as she pointed at her head.

"What do you not understand?" I might as well ask. It would be bad if she's clueless and something crops up later.

"A lot really, but first is..." She paused and looked up as she gathered her thoughts before continuing. "Why did you only give 1,000 cavalry to big sister to intercept Yuan Shu's 20,000 strong army?"

Big sister? ... Ah, seems like Lord Guan Yu's relationship with her is that of sisters right? They've been addressing each other as sisters but their last names are different so these 2 are most likely sworn sisters.

And the 1,000 cavalry she mentioned was the total number of cavalry units in the 10,000 strong Cao army.

"1,000 cavalry units is enough." I said with a leisurely expression. "I gave Lord Guan Yu a lot of extra flags, and with good use of the mist that has yet to dissipate there, a false report of 5,000 cavalry should be enough to give pause to Yuan Shu and her generals."

"Additionally, the point of the interception force is just to stall for time so that we can get in position for an ambush."

"But aren't you afraid that Yuan Shu's army will just charge forth?"

"Which is why I got Lord Guan Yu to falsely declare herself as Bo Fu's subordinate general." I looked at her as I said so but she still had a clueless look on her. "Yuan Shu is a member of a noble family with a very long history and thus has very strong pride. In coming out of the city, she definitely plans to thoroughly defeat Bo Fu. If she sees that Bo Fu has sufficient strength to send

out a subordinate general to intercept her, despite the mutiny, and even challenge her, she will definitely lose her head to rage and send a general to duel Lord Guan Yu in order to make her victory even more complete.”

By declaring that we have 5,000 cavalry, Yuan Shu would likely mistake our total strength as 50,000.

“Oh!! So we just have to arrange a duel then, since big sister will win for sure.”

“Ah, I told Lord Guan Yu to show her mercy on purpose since the main objective is to stall for time.”

Of course, there is one more secondary objective which relates to the cavalry I gave her.

Cavalry are not suited to a forest environment but it is not my intention to send cavalry against the ordinary troops. The targets for the cavalry are the 1,000-man generals who will be commanding from warhorses. Since the cavalry can see from a greater height, they can easily find these generals and kill them together.

And once the 1,000-man generals are killed, the army which was ambushed will definitely descend into greater chaos.

Even though we haven’t reached the battlefield, Lord Zhang Fei is already so excited. I feel that as a warrior, she passes with flying colours.

“Is there anything else?”

“That would be the problem of numbers.” Lord Zhang Fei said as she pointed at the 3,000 strong behind her, “I and Lord Zhang Liao have 3,000 each, but even if it’s an ambush, can we really deal with a 20,000 strong army?”

For the ambush, I separated 6,000 troops into 2 groups. One was led by Lord Zhang Fei and the other by Lord Zhang Liao. I don’t know how strong they are but since Lord Liu Bei recommended them, then there is no reason to doubt them.

“Yuan Shu’s troops are not well trained so the first attack will completely destroy their formation. And the goal of the ambush is chaos, not decimation.” When I think about how Yuan Shu is like, I don’t think she is the sort who will

spend good money to train her troops properly. “And as for the ambush, as long as it succeeds, even if we are outnumbered 10 to 1, it doesn’t mean we will necessarily lose.”

The priorities of the ambush in order of descending importance are to destroy their formation, kill their generals and lastly to reduce their numbers.

“Speaking of which, you should remember what your mission is right.”

“Un, I remember.” Though she said so, it took a while for her to recall the instructions before she continued. “... Try not to get close to Yuan Shu... Right.”

“Un, charge often but don’t stay to fight, just remember this one point. As for leaving a hole in our defenses to Yuan Shu, leave that to Lord Zhang Liao.” I feel like that person is much smarter than you. “I have also made the preparations on Lord Lu Bu’s side. As long as Yuan Shu goes in the direction of the hole, there should be no problem.”

“Haa...”

“Maa, you don’t need to care about what the others have to do and concentrate on your own task.” I couldn’t be bothered to explain any further seeing as she still didn’t get it. “And don’t get your troops to fire arrows. If we injure Yuan Shu by accident, it will negatively impact our negotiations afterwards.”

“Oh, got it.” She seemed to understand this, and soon showed a relaxed expression that was completely devoid of tension as she began swinging her Serpent Spear. “I’m so excited, we can fight soon!”

“Don’t be too reckless when the time comes, and only charge together with Lord Zhang Liao when you see the signal from her.”

“Don’t worry, leave it all to me.” She laughed loudly as she patted her chest which was roughly the same size as mine.

How could I possibly leave it all to you? I came along with you precisely because I’m afraid that something might go wrong on this side...

Sa Sa...

Un? Seems like there’s some sound coming from the grass.

“What’s wrong Lord Zhou Yu?” Zhang Fei asked when she saw me looking to the side.

“No, it’s nothing.” Was it an illusion?

... No.

“Lord Zhang Fei, I’ll be leasing a hundred men down this way.”

“Eh? Eh?! Did something happen?”

Without bothering to explain to her, I signalled my intent to a 100-man general who was running behind me and got him and his men to follow me. I then pulled the reins and headed into the forest.

Though I’m still worried about whether Lord Zhang Fei can execute her duties properly, I’m not more worried about that side of the forest.

There might be a scout there.

“Un, feels like it should be here... Search around everyone, look for anything suspicious.” I made my horse gallop forward and shouted loudly. “Check everything, even the smallest movement in the grass.”

“Yes!!” The hundred odd troops behind yelled back with gusto and then disappeared as they ran out in various directions.

If I’m not wrong, the sounds from before were not from an animal.

If it were from a human, then that means that person is not riding a horse which means that I would have caught up by now. Even if one hides himself, the smallest disturbance can reveal where one is.

And just now, a certain careful light breathing I heard mixed in amongst the sounds of the troops made me suspicious.

In this sort of situation which requires maximum caution, I cannot lower my guard no matter how small the possibility may be.

Putting it another way, I don’t wish for anything to happen, and only hope that what I detected was just me being oversensitive.

Hai, what a waste of a good morning.

I searched about the surrounding area but did not find anything suspicious and relaxed a little as I sat down on a rock under a tree.

“*Achoo~~~~*” The cold rock cooled my butt, and with some help from a breeze, I sneezed yet again.

I don’t know if it’s due to my sneeze or the wind, but some yellowed leaves floated down from the tree.

The cold, autumn forest had an ambience that was worth admiring. If I weren’t fighting a war, it would be enjoyable having a liquor banquet in a slightly yellowed natural environment.

At this time, the cries of cicadas can be heard but soon, they will fall from the trees to the ground and become a part of the soil.

Now that I think about it, doesn’t Yuan Shu resemble a cicada nearing autumn’s end? For Yuan Shu, her end is something inevitable though I don’t know whether she herself is aware about that.

Maa, probably not.

Sa Sa...

A faint sound came from the tree yet again, and several leaves fell once more.

A-re? There wasn’t a wind just now right?

I instinctively raised my head to take a look and though I’d find a bird or a worm...

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

But what appeared in my eyes was a man who was hugging the thick branch upside down with trembling limbs, and was staring at me with a reddened face that had a horrible expression.

I was completely frozen in that instant as I stared at him motionlessly.

“Puaa! Haa... Haa...” Seeing that I had found him, he spat out the breath he had been holding. He then waved one hand as he greeted me. “Yo, yo, hello.”

“... Ah! Who are you? Are you Yuan Shu’s scout?” I regained my senses and

hurriedly drew the sabre at my waist and readied my stance. “Get down now or else—”

“No, that is... Hai~ I really am unlucky.” That man thought for a while in anguish before sighing like a man who has given up, “I’ll come down— Ah!”

“Eh?!~~~~ Waa!!” Before I could even figure out what was going on, my body was crushed under a dead weight and I fell to the ground. It was a good that I fell on my back and didn’t injure my head.

“Ouch...” My head was a little dizzy as I recovered from the shock of the fall. It felt like there was something pressing down on my body and I slowly opened my eyes as I held my head—



— And saw that the man was lying on top of me with his hands right on my tender breasts.

Because I didn’t wear a breastplate, the warmth from his hands were directly transmitted to my breasts through the thin cloth that made its way all the way to my head and dyed my cheeks red.

“I... You, you!” As a pure and innocent young girl 15 years of age, I was at a loss

as to what to do.

“Ouch...” He was just regaining his senses and was shocked when he saw what kind of pose we were in. “Ah, sorry. I’ll just—”

He tried lifting himself up using his hands but he didn’t realise that what he was grasping as not the ground.

And so he put more force into his grip—

“Ah!!~~~~~” A shudder ran through me as I screamed instantly. Only after I screamed did I realise how much of embarrassment I was. “You, you pervert! Where do you think you’re touching?! L, let go of me!”

“Ah, sorry.” He evaded my flailing arms and frantically lifted his hands as he stepped backwards off of me.

I sat up and instinctively tidied up my clothing as I looked at him with cautious eyes. I felt both hatred and embarrassment, and for some reason felt like I wanted to cry. When I looked at him, I felt an intense urge to skin him.

This man was slightly larger than me and had a good face but a downcast look hung about him. He was wearing coarse clothing, and every act seemed like he lacked utter confidence.

Isn’t he just a useless coward.

“U, umm...”

“Don’t speak,” I drew my sword and pointed it at his throat. He gave a “hii!” and went silent. “Whatever the case, you are my captive now so honestly answer the questions I am about to ask you.”

Nods.

“Good,” I need to first ascertain his identity. “You’re Yuan Shu’s scout... No, a 300-man general in her army right?”

Nods.

Though he did not wear plate, nor did he have a sabre at his waist, there was an insignia at his chest which I was able to identify as such.

“Where are your troops? Are they not here?”

Nods.

“Were they here just now?”

Shakes.

“Really?”

“Really! They’re all in the main body and the only one here is me.” I pressed the blade on his throat and he gave another ‘hii’ before shutting up.

“Hmph, forget it then.” I laughed as I was impressed. “Did Yuan Shu send you all here? I can’t believe she actually guessed the route of our ambush.”

Though I was speaking very casually now, I was frantic inside.

Because if what I said was correct, then Yuan Shu has seen through our plan to intercept them and we will then lose the initiative.

But it’s strange if you think about it from their point of view. If they have guessed our movements, then why didn’t they set up a counter-ambush?

Are they planning on letting us execute our plan and then countering us then? Or are they going to take a different route and avoid us altogether?

And how could she have done all this in such a short time? After entering the forest, Yuan Shu actually had the capacity to see through me scheme and prepare accordingly?

If that’s the case, then the only reason why would be that the Cao army’s tracks were exposed. But that would be equally strange as why wouldn’t they be more cautious about leaving behind an empty city?

C, could it be that they plan on counterattacking once we execute our plan from the very beginning then?! That is...

“No, this is not my lord’s will. Everything was just my own conjecture. Yesterday night, I detected the Cao army and thought that you would definitely be lying in wait somewhere near Sun Ce army’s encampment for us.” Just as I was sinking into despair in my thoughts, he began explaining with a frustrated look and clenched teeth. “I was planning to discuss this with my lord and wanted to suggest that we go around the forest. But I was stopped from doing so at the gates by Lord Yan Xiang.”

“Hou~~ And then?” My heart nearly stopped when I heard this. Though the success of this plan was important, I never thought that my plan was completely predicted ahead of time by this man.

“My suggestion was rejected. When I heard this, my worries were finally allayed. “She very resolutely said we would not be ambushed in the forest and then went on and on about the benefits of going through the forest, like how it could cover our tracks *etc.* But I know that there were deficiencies in those benefits that could be exploited against us.”

“Hou~~~” I’d thought he was just a useless coward but he was actually such an extraordinary person.

Maa, that is indeed the case. The odds of being ambushed in such a small route through the forest are practically nil but the side being ambushed forgot that as long as the ambushing side knows the destination of the side that is being ambushed, it doesn’t matter what route they take.

As long as we station troops around the vicinity of the encampment, even if we don’t specially challenge them, Yuan Shu’s army can’t ignore us.

And then, it will be our opportunity to strike.

Though I don’t know what Yan Xiang is like, from what she said to this man, she’s probably just an ordinary person, an appropriate candidate to be Yuan Shu’s strategist.

Maa, whatever the case, it’s a good thing for me that she wasn’t convinced by this man.

Though this man seems unreliable, he is extraordinarily prudent and intelligent. Using him as a 300-man general would be an utter waste of talent.

But~~

“And so you came here hoping to see if we would send our ambushing troops through this way to confirm your conjectures?”

“... Un.”

“You know,” I bent my waist and looked at him from up close with a furious expression which made him withdraw a little. “You came here just to confirm

your conjectures? How can that possibly save the situation?"

"Wu..." Your silence means consent then. But thereafter, he retorted with, "Actually I know it deep down inside that someone like me can't even be a lowly ranked official. Nor am I any good at leading troops in battle. The only thing I'm good at is making wild guesses so it's normal if I'm not recognised."

"Stop saying such self-deprecating words!"

"Eh?"

"... No, nothing." I lost my cool there and let him drag me down with that retort, and turned my face away.

Hmph, showing that again, that smile of a useless coward that makes one hate him.

If it were me, I would have stopped Yuan Shu at all costs even if I had to kill Yan Xiang instead of giving up and coming out here for my own self-satisfaction.

But, perhaps this person's talents can serve my lord...

"Let's go."

"Eh? Where to?"

"We can't catch up to the main party now so we'll head to the Cao camp and wait for the battle to end." I twirled the sword in my hands as I sheathed it. "Don't forget that you're a captive so be more obedient."

Because he was a little taller than me, I ordered him to squat out of spite. Thereafter, I picked out some vines which I used to tie his hands with. If I'm not careful, who knows what this pervert might do to me.

"... Ah, yes." He said falteringly. And as he got up, he bowed in the direction where his lord was marching towards before following me.

Seems like he's quite a loyal person. I don't hate decorous people.

"... What's your name?" I asked as I looked at him seriously. Personally, I rarely ask for people's names.

"Eh?" He hesitated for a moment at my words before he replied. "My last name is Lu, my given name is Su, and my courtesy name is Zi Jing."

Un, Lu Su huh. It's a good name, but this isn't reason enough to praise him.

"Is that so," I only said as much in reply. "Let's go then."

As I turned around, for some reason, my lips curled up.

(TL: In the original, Zhou Yu was the one who served Yuan Shu while Lu Su rejected Yuan Shu's invitation. Zhou Yu then invited Lu Su to join Sun Quan after Zhou Yu left Yuan Shu to join Sun Ce.)

(TL: Rare is the harem series that bequeaths girls, and a very important character too, to another male character besides MC...)

Chapter 13: Don't tell me this is the strike on Yuan Shu (4)

TL: I intend on finishing volume 3 by this week, and volume 4 by next month.

“Hai~~~~” I sat on a shrub as I stared at the most distant leaf in the forest in my field of vision. Rustling, discordant sounds could be heard from time to time.

Eventually, the anxiety inside finally became too much to bear and I spat it out. “Even if it’s for ensuring my safety, isn’t this a little overboard?”

After a round of democratic voting, my exclusion from the entire battle was passed unanimously.

And so ever since they’ve left, I’ve been sitting in a bored daze for over an hour already.

Having to stay here while the others go into battle is honestly more tortuous than joining them. The constant fear of what might happen that filled my heart made it difficult for me to calm down.

“This is for the sake of our lord.” “Though it may not be nice to hear it, but my lord’s presence on the battlefield will only make things difficult.” “... You don’t need to be so down all of a sudden, Zi Zhong may have said it a little bluntly but what she said makes sense. Moreover, protecting the main base is a far important mission than Xuan De thinks. There are no cushy jobs in war.”

The you who is currently sipping tea on a rocking chair has no right to say such things.

Holding fort with me at the main base was the Xu state 3 and 1,000 reserve troops. Apart from us 4 who were staring at the forest doing nothing, the other troops were currently anxiously packing up.

We don’t know if our plan worked but since we’ve exposed ourselves, we will have to break camp regardless.

“You 3 say that guarding the main base is important, but how is that important? Explain it to me.” I was bored so I decided to be a bit feisty.

“In theory, no matter how much the battle is in your favour, you will have to retreat if your main camp is taken.” “The main camp is something like a means of retreat, and it will be difficult to advance without a way to retreat.” “Maa, it’s something that only applies in theory. And our main camp hasn’t been seen by them yet so nothing should happen.”

“If xiao Yong didn’t say that, I would have been convinced.”

To put it simply, we’re very free right? How does this help address my concerns?

I felt strangely frustrated and didn’t continue arguing. As I bent my head and stared at the fine grains of sand on the ground and the grass stalks, I shook my head lightly.

I wonder if I am befitting of the position of a feudal lord. It feels like I’ve become a mascot character.

In Xuchang, everyone had expressed their intent in following me. Though I’m grateful for that, I’m very uneasy and perplexed.

I don’t know how much charisma I have, to be able to be acknowledged by so many heroes and great people. But since I’ve been acknowledged, I keep getting the feeling that everyone will one day see through how useless I really am and leave me.

That is what I fear the most.

Perhaps I should really seek a way I can be useful.

“My lord~~ We’re back~~” A voice without much vitality came from the forest.

I put aside my internal turmoil and raised my head to look at the forest I had been staring at before. Not far off, I could see Feng Xian with her halberd at the head. She didn’t seem very perturbed from her mission.

Feng Xian is back, that means...

I waved at her and she waved her halberd back when she saw that it was me sitting by the forest.

As they walked closer, I could see 3 figures who had their hands tied in front of them.

Was it Yuan Shu and her subordinates?

When they got much closer, I was able to clearly see what the 3 looked like. Though the 2 behind were new faces, the one in front was a child wearing an eye-catching royal robe whom I've seen before.

Even though she was a captive, Yuan Shu still put on airs around her.

"Oi, can't you loosen the ropes a little? What if I get a bruise from this huh?!"

"Stop spouting such useless words. Everyone is tied up similarly." Feng Xian shot down Yuan Shu without even looking back at her.

"Please don't talk my lord!"

"Hai, I'm understanding you less and less my lord."

"You both are really noisy! I'm the Emperor and you both must listen to me!!"

Unlike Yuan Shu, the 3 subordinate generals beside her seemed very calm and their tones seemed to suggest they were already resigned to their fates.

"Lord Lu Bu has returned much earlier than expected." "Un, looks like it was a great success." "We'll probably get a good night's sleep tonight."

Didn't you have a good night's sleep yesterday as well?

"My lord, I have accomplished my task." Lu Bu said as she exited the forest and stopped in front of me while pointing behind her. "Apart from Yuan Shu and her 2 subordinate generals, there are 1,000 ordinary troops."

"Oh, it's been hard on you... Doesn't look like it was very hard?" Looking at Feng Xian who was yawning with drooping eyes, it didn't seem like she had exerted a lot of effort.

Something that was more noticeable was Yuan Shu, who was presently grinding her teeth and looked like she would charge out anytime. Though she probably thought she looked fearsome, in reality, she seemed more like an angry little chihuahua.

"Bring Yuan Shu and her subordinate generals to the main tent while the rest will bring the other captives to the side while you await further orders!!" Feng Xian shouted to everyone tiredly before sighing as she turned to me. "That's

right, I barely did anything. I'd thought it would be an intense battle but who knew that Yuan Shu would surrender immediately without resisting."

"Haa?" Surrendered?

"In other words, we won without a fight." "Looking at Yuan Shu's personality, she probably felt that it would be better to obediently surrender since the other side already said they were here to capture her alive." "Though them surrendering is a rather spineless act, it's something that is unambiguously good for us."

Even if the Xu state 3 didn't explain, I would have understood as well. As a second young miss of a noble family, Yuan Shu couldn't possibly understand the pride of a warrior. This result is quite reasonable if you think about it that way.

I didn't plan on making too many comments and got up with the intention of entering the main tent. But when I saw the captives, my feet stopped.

They were far too thin.

Each seemed thinner than the other and the spears they held seem like thick pillars in their hands. Their faces were pale, and their breaths were ragged even when they sat down.

"... Gong You, bring these people to our stores to get some food."

"... Even though that is something that should be done." "No matter if they are feudal lords or generals or ordinary soldiers, all captives should be interrogated first." "And these 1,000 odd men have pretty good equipment so they're probably Yuan Shu's personal guard. If they were to try anything funny..."

They had their reservations and what they said does indeed make sense from a strategic perspective.

"What could people who can barely even hold their spears possibly do." I replied immediately after xiao Yong finished, and then continued in a sombre tone. "In any case, just give them food first. Lives are more important than strategies."

If it's food for few thousand people, it's not something I can't afford. And besides, it was Meng De's to begin with. I'm just distributing something that

isn't mine to begin with.

The 3 smiled meaningfully and acknowledged the order before leading the captives to the stores.

"Feng Xian, let's head into the main tent." I said as I patted Feng Xian's shoulders.

Feng Xian was probably still sleepy as she only nodded slightly before following me into the main tent.

There is of course a very good reason for capturing Yuan Shu alive.

Even if our interception and ambush succeeded, it was unlikely that we would be able to wipe them out and half of the 20,000 strong would likely make it back to the city, which would still be more than enough to make for a difficult siege battle.

And so, we need Yuan Shu to hand over Shouchun city to us by any means necessary.

And so, my job is to handle the negotiations with her.

"You want me to give you Shouchun city? Never."

"..." Though I'd known that it wouldn't be easy, I didn't think that it would be this difficult right off the bat.

From the very beginning up till now, I've been trying to convince her nicely. I had thought that the simple minded Yuan Shu was someone even I could handle but who knew that she would reject everything I said without even thinking.

— If I haven't returned to camp before Yuan Shu is brought back, then I ask that Lord Liu Bei scare her with some threats. She will probably hand over the city obediently very quickly.

This was what Zhou Yu said to me before she left. I hadn't intended on threatening anyone but since she's not complying, I have no choice.

I looked at Feng Xian, hoping for some help from her on this.

Feng Xian looked at me in turn and grunted in acknowledgement before placing her halberd on a wooden chair beside her.

“You all ought to consider this carefully. We could very well kill all of you before attacking the city.” Feng Xian said these words in a tone so cold that even I shuddered.

“...” Yuan Shu seemed to have withdrawn a bit at hearing this, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she was at a loss as to what to do.

Un, seems like it's as Zhou Yu said...

“Don't be silly, why do we have to give you Shouchun city?” I'd thought victory was in sight but all of a sudden, someone interjected. I looked over and saw that it was Yuan Shu's female subordinate general who had a shiny forehead.

“Even if you kill us all, our forces will not be wiped out in the forest. When you finally attack the city, there should be close to more or less 10,000 troops waiting for you. And as for what kind of losses you should be expecting in a siege battle with a defense of that size, I don't think you need me to tell you.”

I was stopped short by her but I couldn't back out at this juncture.

“B, but is that really fine? If Yuan Shu dies, the city will descend into chaos.” I stood up from my seat to calm myself down. “Though the army still remains, if they should succumb to in-fighting, then it will also be an easy victory for us.”

Looking at how malnourished the personal guard was, troop morale cannot be very high.

“You need not be worried about that,” The other subordinate general who was covered in soil said in a mocking tone. “Though they're all selfish people, they aren't the type who will prioritise their selfish desires in a situation like this where they have a common enemy.”

“Perhaps someone might just surrender outright?!”

“Hmph!” Yuan Shu straightened her back as she haughtily continued. “My subordinates are not so unambitious people. Every one of them is a despicable person who is planning on stealing the Jade Seal for themselves and declare themselves Emperor.”

What is there to show off about this...

“And so, with your abilities, the best you can do is kill me. Even then, you will

find that the city is beyond you.” Yuan Shu said with a scornful look.

With what seemed like a conclusion from Yuan Shu, I felt like our negotiations have fallen through.

“What? You think I don’t dare to?” Feng Xian could no longer hold herself back and reached out to wield her halberd.

I grabbed her hand and stopped her.

Now wasn’t the time to act rashly.

As that subordinate general said, we would only mount a siege if that was the only choice left to us.

At the end of the day, we had to take the city after all.

“Yuan Shu...”

“Don’t speak to me again, lackey of Cao Cao.”

“I’m only trying to help...” I felt even more at a loss, seeing Yuan Shu’s rage.

What do we do... If it’s like this, then we can only wait for Zhou Yu and the rest to return.

But I really didn’t think that Yuan Shu was so fearless.

...

Eh?

Wait a minute, what is this feeling of incongruity I’m getting?

If Yuan Shu doesn’t fear death, then why did she surrender without a fight?

“Yuan Shu’s subordinate generals are truly a hindrance.” Just as I was trying to figure out the reason for the disconnect, Feng Xian began muttering as she frowned. “I shouldn’t have listened to what Yuan Shu said at the very beginning and just killed those 2.”

At the very beginning?

“Feng Xian,” I whispered as I elbowed Feng Xian’s waist. “What did you say to them at the very beginning?”

“Ah?” She was baffled as to why I was asking her this but she didn’t think too

much about it and explained. “Nothing much really, I just said ‘Yuan Shu is to be captured alive and everyone is to be killed’, and then Yuan Shu obediently surrendered. She had requested that we allow everyone to live and I felt that was doable so I agreed. But now I see that she kept those 2 subordinate generals alive so that they can help her in negotiations.”

“...” No, that can’t be it. If I think about it from a favourable view of Yuan Shu, then it must be that...

“Feng Xian, bring Yuan Shu’s subordinate generals out.” I immediately looked at Yuan Shu’s face after I said so, and was delighted to see that she had wavered, before continuing. “I wish to speak with her alone.”

Chapter 14: Don't tell me this is the strike on Yuan Shu (5)

"You, what are you going to do to my subordinates?" Yuan Shu sprang up suddenly and tried to charge at me after those 2 were forcibly removed from the tent, but because she was tied to the chair, she fell to the ground along with the chair.

This reaction of hers confirms my hypothesis.

"No, nothing at all." I calmly answered as I looked at Yuan Shu with steady eyes. "Or perhaps, you're afraid of me doing something?"

"..." She stared at me wordlessly.

I suppressed the nervousness in my mind and walked over to Yuan Shu who followed me with her eyes.

"Let's make a deal." I intentionally curled my lips, hoping to look devious. "I can let you go."

"Eh? This—"

"But, I can't let you go scot-free of course." I interrupted her immediately and she became silent as she waited for me to continue. "You can go back, but your subordinate generals will become my spoils of war."

"What!!" The moment I finished, she suddenly yelled out and lay down motionless, like a deflated balloon, "... How could this be?"

Her voice now, had lost all of the haughtiness from before.

"Maa, that's something that can't be helped." I said as I pulled a chair over and sat beside Yuan Shu. "No matter what, I have to have some gains after winning a battle right."

"... What are you trying to say?"

"Didn't I say it earlier? This is a deal." I shifted my glance away from Yuan Shu and looked outside the tent. "I'm permitting you to live, but at the cost of your subordinates' lives. Or, you could give me the city, and then commit suicide

thereafter. In return, I guarantee that your subordinate generals will be treated well and they will even have a decent official position in Imperial Court. How about it?"

After I finished, Yuan Shu's head was still hung low as she was deep in thought.

Anyone who knows a thing about the original Yuan Shu would definitely think that this Yuan Shu would choose the former. In fact, any feudal lord, no matter how benevolent or selfish, would probably choose the former.

But...

"No, I cannot leave them here." Yuan Shu said weakly. But to me, this was her most resolute words of everything I've heard from her till now.

"Is that really okay? For a feudal lord to go so far for 2 subordinate generals..."

"A master cannot abandon her servants!!" She yelled out as she raised her head and looked at me with an unexpectedly proud face. "I am their master, and I will be responsible for their lives."

"Is that so..."

Was this really Yuan Shu?

No this was unquestionably Yuan Shu. The descendent of the family that held the 3 prime Court positions for 4 generations, and the hero who reigned over Huainan.

There is definitely more to Yuan Shu than her external countenance. A feudal lord, after all, needs valour and conviction.

Even if the feudal lord happens to be a spoilt rich young miss.

"... So, so..." She seemed to be getting choked up but she braced herself and continued. "As long as you let my subordinate generals live, I will give you Shouchun and my life."

"... Oh, I understand."

Success!

Though I didn't show it, I was very happy with this outcome and thoroughly pleased with myself.

Of course, I'm taking the city but I never had the intention of taking Yuan Shu's life.

It took a bit of swindling but I finally got the city. Now all I have to do is wait for the rest to return and have Yuan Shu go to the city and holler—

“Report!!!”

Just then, a military courier's blaring announcement resounded in my ears. I'd thought it was an illusion but then I saw him kneel before me.

“... What is it?”

Did someone sustain an injury or fall in battle? Or did the ambush fail? Could the enemy have been reinforced by allies?

It's definitely nothing good.

“A report just arrived from the frontlines. Of the 20,000 strong that we engaged with, about half surrendered in the chaos. Thereafter, Shouchun city seemed to have received news of the ambush and Lei Bo and Chen Lan opened the gates and surrendered.”

(TL: Minor characters. In the original, they left Yuan Shu after he declared himself Emperor.)

...

“A-re?” Yuan Shu, who was behind me, let out an unexpectedly strange sound at her gross misjudgement of her subordinates.

But really, shouldn't it be me who is making strange noises?

“Oi oi!” I lamented as I squatted down and hugged my head, “Didn't you say your generals won't surrender?!”

“I, I didn't even know I had subordinates by that name!” For some reason, she yelled back at me as though I had maligned her. “I can only remember Yan Xiang and Ji Ling~~~”

“... Hai~~~” I gave a long sigh as I walked toward Yuan Shu.

“You, what do you...” She seemed frightened when she saw me walking over but returned to a calm expression soon after as she continued in a slightly tearful

voice. “Yes, that’s right. I agreed to give you my head and I will not go back on my word.”

I smiled helplessly at her voice and when I bent down after I walked behind her, she even trembled lightly.

And thereafter— I loosened Yuan Shu’s restraints.

“... Eh?” She was dumbfounded at this action of mine and did not know if she should even stand. “What are you...”

I stretched my back and feigned a look of nonchalance. “Maa, I’ve already taken the city so I no longer have any reason to keep you tied up.”

“Bu, but didn’t you, my head...”

“Just a bluff, I don’t like such bloody acts.” I hurriedly waved my hands to allay her concerns.

“Eh? A-re?”

Seeing that she was still in a state of shock, I exited the tent to look for Feng Xian with the intention of untying the ropes on the other 2 as well, hoping that she hadn’t killed the 2 hastily.

“Is my lord done?” Just as I exited the tent, Feng Xian who was leaning against the tent feigned ignorance and asked.

“... Were you eavesdropping?”

“I guess,” She admitted to it unhesitatingly after she saw that she had been seen through. “I was just afraid Yuan Shu would join us or something...”

“Haa? Join us?” What are you talking about?

(TL: In case this isn’t clear, by ‘us’, she means the harem.)

“My lord, you really have no EQ.” Her expression wavered slightly, and her eyebrows seemed slightly creased. She then turned to the 2 figures to the side. “Go in and speak with your lord, you 2.”

As she said so, I saw that the bindings on the 2 subordinate generals had already been removed, and they seemed to be very reserved as they stood there motionlessly. Well, I guess that’s normal for a captive.

“Relax, your lord is inside and she’s perfectly fine.” I smiled as I said so, hoping they would be less wary.

They looked at each other and bowed to me before rushing past me into the tent. Within a short amount of time, the sound of several girls crying could be heard from the tent.

Loyalty is what holds a lord and his retainer together but I can feel something deeper than that, something more akin to familial love and bonds.

“Oh Feng Xian, did you know? About Shouchun city.” I had a lot of thoughts bothering me but I couldn’t forget to discuss serious matters with Feng Xian.

“Ah, the courier told me just now and I’ve told the troops to prepare to move out.”

“Un,” I replied, feeling perfectly calm and devoid of all nervousness.

“We’ll leave when the preparations are done.” I said as I looked at the ground and kneaded the grass with my boots.

“Got it... Ah, that’s right, there was one other piece of news.” Feng Xian continued as she recalled something. “Apparently, another army that belongs to Lord Cao Cao is currently making its way here from Xu state.”

Is that so. So she did have other armies ready huh.

But... Xu state huh.

“Who is it that’s leading the army?” I asked, though I already knew who it would be.

“Supposedly it’s the newly appointed Inspector of Xu state, the name was...” Feng Xian thought for a moment before continuing in an uncertain tone. “... I think it’s Che Zhou.”

Chapter 15: Don't tell me this is the slaying of Che Zhou

TL: This is the chapter from which everything starts breaking down and the roller coaster starts to fall.

Meng De POV

I obeyed Hua Tuo's instructions and quietly rested in my quarters for several days but as I looked out of the window at the yellowing leaves, I began to get anxious again.

Because it was full-on rest, every matter was to be left to the administrative officials I chose. They tend to engage in a fair bit of politicking but their skill at governance is above and beyond the average official.

It was the frontlines... That made me worry.

On one side, Dian Wei, Liu Bei. On the other, Zhang Xiu, Yuan Shu.

I wonder how it's like for the both of them. In theory, there should not be any hiccups and everything should proceed smoothly.

But why is it, why am I feeling so...

"..." I placed my hand over my heart as my eyes shifted from looking at the outside to the rafters, "Cheng Yu, you're around right."

Just as I finished, a black figure descended from the rafters in one smooth movement. As I turned to look, the small yet mature body of Cheng Yu in a respectful pose could be seen. "What are your orders, my lord."

"About the frontlines—"

"Please forgive me about this but—"

"My body has recovered. And please don't interrupt me. No matter what, I'm still your lord."

"..." Her face tightened as she sank into silence for several minutes before continuing. "Dian Wei's side has concluded with a great victory and Zhang Xiu's

surrender. Because Sun Ce has gone to attack Yuan Shu as well, that side should be able to report success some time over the next couple of days.”

What Cheng Yu said was brief, but I still committed the important points to my memory. Un, looks like everything went just as I had predicted.

“Is that so,” I said as I slowly got up. Cheng Yu came forward to help me up, but my pride made me stop her from doing so. “On Dian Wei’s end, just keep up what you’ve been doing. As for Xuan De, don’t forget to send Che Zhou to assist him. Shouchun is a critical area and if we hand it over to Sun Ce, Xu state will be vulnerable.”

“Don’t worry my lord. I have already made the necessary arrangements. By my calculations, General Che Zhou should have reached Shouchun by now.”

“Un, that’s good.” I waved to my servants who brought the tea over. These few autumn days, I’ve been lying in bed all day and it’s thanks to this new tea from the south that’s helped give me some comfort. “Don’t forget to tell Che Zhou to get along with Xuan De. Che Zhou is one of my earliest subordinates but she’s arrogant and callous. Don’t make her slight him.”

As I said so, I gently blew the tea leaves and slowly took a sip. Fragrant, as expected.

“About that...” After a long while, Cheng Yu began to speak hesitatingly. “I gave an extra mission to Che Zhou.”

“Un? An extra mission?” My hand stopped in mid-air as my lips curled unconsciously, “Hou hou, what are you scheming behind my back huh?”

Cheng Yu has always been a straightforward person and says what she means. Now that she’s being hesitant about saying it, it’s definitely something big.

“...” Cheng Yu suddenly bowed deeply before continuing, “I instructed General Che Zhou to deal with Lord Liu Bei—” Cheng Yu’s words stopped there.

The autumn breeze blew outside the window, and apart from sounds of the wind outside, the room was virtually silent. Perhaps even Cheng Yu was holding her breath.

I placed my teacup on a table at the side and used my hands to hook my hair

behind my ears and sat up on the bed.

“... Assassinate him you mean?” I helped Cheng Yu state what she meant and then smiled as I looked at her, “Even though I’ve said it clearly before... Can you tell me why you need to go so far.”

After hearing me say so, Cheng Yu’s look did not relax from being given a chance to explain. Instead, her expression became even more serious.

“My lord, think about it. Liu Bei has the administrative officials who were skilled at various aspects of governance who were previously under the employment of Tao Qian. His warrior generals include Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Lu Bu, Zhang Liao among many others and he not has over 10,000 troops. Shouchun city is within his grasp, and if Liu Bei so wishes, he can form an alliance with Liu Biao in Jing state and Yuan Shao in Hebei and launch a 3-pronged attack here. When the time comes, we will find ourselves in deep peril.”

Cheng Yu took a step closer to me with each line, and with each step, her expression seemed to be ever more anxious. She was currently wearing the dark blue clothing not much different from what an assassin would wear and would definitely alarm any guards who saw this.”

(TL: For an accurate depiction of what she’s wearing, see (2) of Xun Yu’s character design.)

After saying so much, I do of course get what she means. What Cheng Yu says makes sense but—

“But didn’t you say it yourself? ‘If Liu Bei so wishes.’” I relaxed my body and placed my arms on the pillow. “If Xuan De has the intent, he need not go through so much trouble. He could have just assassinated me and seize control of the Son of Heaven by using his status as the Royal Uncle, no?”

Of course, if Xuan De were to assassinate someone, he would definitely not use something as pathetic as having a physician poison me.

“Cheng Yu, you must understand that my decisions were made not based on my trust of Xuan De, but rather of my judgement of his person as someone who does things openly and honestly. If he truly thought of me as an enemy, he would never have followed me into Xuchang. The moment he enters Xuchang,

his every move will be under my control. For what reason should he take such a risk?”

(TL: This is where it's very different from the original. Indeed, Liu Bei here could easily take over from Cao Cao with all that talent under him. In the original, Liu Bei was at his lowest when he entered Xuchang.)

“...” Cheng Yu was silent, but looking at her expression, she should have more to say. After a while, she finally gave in, “I’ll write to Che Zhou and ask her not to act for now.”

“Un,” I picked up my teacup once more, only to find that the tea had cooled, “Though I don’t know if it will be in time.”

I turned the teacup and looked at the leaves that floated at the top.

“General Che Zhou could have already—”

“The one I’m worried about is not Xuan De.” I interrupted Cheng Yu and lowered my head as I stared at the floral patterns of my bed sheets, “I’m worried about Che Zhou.”

“Eh?” Cheng Yu made a rare, weird sound.

I was always uneasy about sending Che Zhou to govern Xu state alone. I keep getting the feeling that something will go wrong from this trip of hers.

“Report!!!~~~~~” Just as I was thinking about all this, a military courier came running in from outside.

Un? Did something happen?

Liu Bei POV

By the time we entered the city, the rest were already inside.

Though we had been here for a couple of days now, we’d been fighting all this while and this was my first view of Shouchun city. I must say, this is a place that’s easy to defend and difficult to attack. The city walls are high and the trenches in front of the city walls were deep. The only way past the city walls were 4 drawbridges.

If we had to lay siege on this city, I wonder what our chances would be. I

sighed in relief as I looked at the lowering drawbridge in front of me.

“Ah! Big brother is here!” A voice came from the other side of the drawbridge and O looked over and saw Yi De and the rest waving at me.

“Oh!” I waved back at them as well.

“Listen closely. In a while, you will be placed in the prison for some time. Try not to speak at all during this period.” Just then, Feng Xian who was beside me was giving instructions to Yuan Shu and her subordinates, “After some time, Xuan De will let you all go, so don’t think about doing anything funny.”

“Ye... Yes!”

Feng Xian was probably only being honest with them, with no intention of scaring them at all. But her naturally dangerous look did not properly communicate her intent, and the 3 tensed up.

“Alright alright,” I said to Yuan Shu as I patted Feng Xian’s shoulders, “Don’t need to be so nervous. I just need you to settle some documents. Even if it’s a time of chaos, as troops belonging to the Imperial Court, we have to do things properly.”

“Oh, oh.” Yuan Shu replied as she nodded a few times fervently, which made me smile helplessly.

Though I said as much, I knew that it was fine to leave it to Lei Bo who was the one who surrendered. If it came down to it, I could do it as well, and it wasn’t as though the formalities were necessary in times like these.

The real reason why I’m detaining Yuan Shu is because she probably has a limited number of places she can go even if I release her now. Given her temper, it is unlikely that she had cordial relations with her neighbouring peers and so realistically, the only places she can go will be Jing state and Jiangdong. And so, I planned to send her to the north to find her older sister.

(TL: In the original, Liu Bei defeated Yuan Shu who was already thoroughly defeated by Sun Ce and was on his way to meet Yuan Shao. Yuan Shu died after retreating and turning back.)

But why is it that I have to go so far for her?

Hai, I sighed, feeling troubled.

Speaking of which, I felt that I had finally made myself useful for once but who knew that Lei Bo would be one step ahead of me and hand over the city. In that case, aren't I the most useless of all?

Hai, I sighed despondently.

Never mind. This is better than any surprise accidents happening.

And anyway, from what I know, wasn't Liu Bei the same as how I am now? Always doing unneeded things and ending up having to pay for it.

Just like at Baidi city.

... Eh?

If I've become Liu Bei, then won't I end up dying in Baidi city as I'm being carried by the currents of history?

Come on, isn't that a little too unreasonable?

"Big brother?"

"... Eh?" I regained my senses to find that I'd already crossed the drawbridge and was now in front of everyone. I hurriedly gathered my thoughts and stopped thinking about things I had no answers to, "Oh oh, it's been hard on everyone. How is it? Was anyone injured?"

"The enemy's numerical advantage was too great and so we sustained some casualties," Yun Chang reported as she walked up to me on horseback, "But thanks to Lord Zhou Yu's scheme, the casualties were minimised."

Well, it is Zhou Yu after all.

I thought back to the scene when Zhou Yu came and looked about but could not find that imposing figure.

"Eh? Where is Sun Ce and her subordinates?"

"If you're talking about Lord Sun Ce..." "They rested for a bit in the city, and then took off." "She said something about giving Shouchun city in return for the favour though that is something that should be done of course."

The Xu state 3 said so with their hands in their sleeves as they stood in a neat

row.

“Eh? So they’ve gone back already?” I was a little surprised at that as I was still expecting that there might be some disputes or negotiations over Shouchun city.

“Ah, my lord, Lord Sun Ce also said that ‘After Lord Liu Bei has settled everything, come over to Jiangdong to enjoy some flower viewing over wine’ or something.” Zhang Liao said, and handed over a meatball with a disgusted face as though she wanted to throw it away to Feng Xian, “Geh, my lord, for you.”

“Ah, thanks.”

Flower viewing over wine huh... Un, from what I know, Jiangdong’s scenery is gorgeous. If I am able to, I would like to make a trip there.

And pay a visit to uncle Sun Jian while I’m at it too.

“Good boy~ Good boy~” Feng Xian received Red Hare and began cuddling it. Red Hare seemed to have really gotten close with Feng Xian and licked her icy expression profusely. And though it was not obvious, I could see that Red Hare’s licks seemed to have thawed Feng Xian’s expressions somewhat and her smile looked much warmer.

(TL: I don’t actually know what sex Red Hare is but Feng Xian says 乖~乖~ to it and when translated, I have to add a subject in so I’m just assuming it’s male for now.)

“Oi! Stop talking about unnecessary things.”

Un?

An unfamiliar voice came from behind everyone and I looked from between the crowds and saw a female general wearing a grand and shiny set of plate armour and wielding a jade sword.

“Oi oi! You’re Liu Bei right!” She walked over with a disdainful look and a scowl which made her image even worse than it was. When she came up to me, she put her hands on her waist as she sized me up, “You really look pathetic huh.”

... Pa, pathetic?

“What are you say—” Yi De made to charge at her but Yun Chang stopped her.

It's good that Yun Chang is calm at times like these and no matter what, we can't afford to offend her.

"Would you happen to be General Che Zhou?" I asked as I respectfully bowed.

"Hmph!" She laughed mockingly, and looked around her as she continued, "That's right, it's me, the strongest in the world."

"..." I was shocked at hearing this.

Strongest in the world... Isn't that a bit overdoing it?

As they say... First Lu, second Ma, third Dian Wei, fourth Guan, fifth Zhao, sixth Zhang Fei, then its Huang, Xu, Sun, and the 2 Xiahou, the other 2 Zhangs, Xu, Pang, Gan, Zhou, Wei. That's already 19 people, how could Che Zhou claim to be the strongest?

(TL: Depending on the source and opinions, the relative positions may differ. Especially at the lower end, some people might differ entirely. But it's widely agreed that Lu Bu is the strongest and the top 10 are well recognised.)

But leaving that aside... From what I know, Che Zhou's life will end soon. And the one to kill her is—

Just then, I locked eyes with Yun Chang who was forcing a smile and nodded at me.

If Yun Chang kills Che Zhou, won't I become enemies with Meng De? I can't let Yun Chang do anything to her.

... But I don't sense any animosity at all from Yun Chang towards her.

"Hmph! Listen well Liu Xuan De," Just as I was gathering my thoughts, she continued speaking, "I am here to—"

!!

In the next instant, she fell to ground after being hit by something.

Out of nowhere, a single arrow pierced Che Zhou's throat who was now on the ground.

"Enemies?!" Everyone drew their weapons and got into position.

"Shield warriors stand guard!" Along with Yun Chang's shout, the soldiers who

were at the city gates rushed over.

And just 30 paces away from me, several people who looked like ordinary citizens charged at us with weapons drawn.

“Be careful my lord!” Yun Chang yelled out as she swung out with a spear she picked up from nearby.

The long spear tossed an enemy several meters away like a cannon.

Sou Sou—

The sound of arrows being shot out rang out again, but the shield warriors were now in their formation in front of us and blocked them all.

“Get the military couriers to tell the troops to eradicate the enemies that have blended in with the civilians!” Yun Chang yelled out as she fought on.

“Where did the arrows came from?!”

“Seems like it’s from the troops that surrendered on the city gates!” Zhang Liao said as she peeked from between the shields.

“Those bastards, have they fallen this far?!”

“Kill them all.”

Feng Xian and Yi De clenched their teeth as they charged out from behind the shields with 2 platoons following behind them as they went from different directions toward the mob.

In the meantime, I and Sun Qian pulled Che Zhou over while making sure that it was safe to do so. She was still alive, and we broke off the arrow stuck in her throat to prevent further blood loss.

“*Ke Ke...*” Che Zhou was presently coughing blood and breathing with great difficulty, and didn’t seem like she had much life left in her,

“General Che Zhou!?” I lightly shook her, “Hang in there, we’ll bring you to safety soon!” As I said so, I began asking where the nearest physicians were.

How could this have happened? Why did the surrendered troops rebel?!

If Che Zhou were to die here, then we might not be able to talk ourselves out of this...

Just then, I found that someone was pulling on my clothing. I looked over to see that it was Che Zhou's hand. Her grip was now almost devoid of strength, and if I just shook myself, her hand would probably drop.

But she kept holding on to my sleeve, and seemed like she wanted to say something.

"Ah— *Ke Ke*..."

"Don't speak anymore! We're going to save you."

"Big brother, it's enough already." Yun Chang said words that made my heart go cold as she patted my shoulders.

"Eh?" I turned back and found that Yun Chang had already drawn the sabre by her waist and was ready to slash down.

"Wait! Yun Chang, what are you doing?"

"I think General Che Zhou is hoping for someone to end her misery."

"But..." I wanted to say more, but Che Zhou's actions left me speechless.

Che Zhou closed her eyes in response to Yun Chang's words.

Yun Chang was right. As warrior, Che Zhou definitely has her pride.

"Move away big brother. I don't think this a scene big brother can stomach yet." Yun Chang pushed me aside and placed her sword across Che Zhou's neck.

Hai! Along with a sigh in my heart, Yun Chang's sword descended on Che Zhou like it was supposed to in history.

We later found out that the one who rebelled was another subordinate general of Yuan Shu's, Zhang Xun.

Seems like he had the intent to rebel from the very beginning, and decided to act when he saw us entering the city. He mistook Che Zhou as the highest commanding officer and acted against her first.

Thereafter, we easily dispatched Zhang Xun's troops.

But now, we find ourselves in a difficult position with Che Zhou's death.

Chapter 16: Don't tell me this is the fall of Dian Wei

TL: Last chapter of volume 3.

Meng De POV

In an instant, I lost all control of my body and my vision began to sway as the silk left my limp hands.

Seems like Cheng Yu and Feng Xiao are shouting but I can't seem to even stand.

My vision went dark.

"You're Dian Wei right?" I said as I put down the dispatch report in my hands and raised my head to look at the petite, mean-looking girl in front of me.

No, I can only say that she is short...

Looking at her breasts, I sighed internally.

"..." She didn't speak, and stayed in a perfect bow without looking at me.

"Dian Wei, you should introduce yourself at least right."

Come to think of it, such rigid fellows are really dying out huh. Every time a new officer comes before me, he/she will always brag about his/her achievements. In return, I would always question them as to why they are coming to such a provincial general like myself if they are so capable.

"May I ask where will I be reporting to?" She completely ignored what I said. Feels like she is more interested in being a foot soldier than an officer.

"Aiya, you don't need to be in such a hurry. Standing around is tiring so have a seat first."

"Yes." She said as she sat down on a chair at the side as though she were executing a mission.

She really is rigid to a fault. And as I was thinking this, I began carefully sizing her up.



This person's nature is very rigid and to the book. She neither makes a request nor does she flatter me, so much so that she is almost like a block of wood. It's almost as if she thinks of nothing but war.

But though she was like this, I could sense some aspirations in her. Perhaps her ambitions were grounded by reality.

Keke, looks like she's an interesting one.

"Meng De, what do you think?" Yuan Rang, who was standing beside me, tiptoed and whispered softly to me.

"Un, yes." I covered my mouth with my sleeve, "Though I know nothing about

her yet, I feel that she has a lot of potential in her.”

“... As expected of Meng De.” Yuan Rang nodded and gave an impressed smile, “I heard that when she served under Zhang Miao, she was able to carry a war banner that weighed as much as a person alone.”

Alone? That really is impressive.

I began to see Dian Wei in a new light, and her radiance made me even more fascinated with her.

“Zhang Miao is bad at recognising talent, and I seized the opportunity to transfer her here while the other feudal lords were executing personnel changes.” Yuan Rang smiled gleefully, as though she had found a great bargain while shopping.

“But I don’t recall Zhang Miao being such a mediocre leader? If it’s him, he should be able to see that she’s a talented warrior.”

“This is just a rumour.” Yuan Rang did not whisper but said the next words directly into my ears, “She seems to have a record.”

In our lingo, a record means that the person has committed murder.

I see...

I nodded twice as I finally understood. Looking at Dian Wei, who was still sitting up straight, she did not seem like she was burdened by her crime in the least.

If she can be that unperturbed, she is either a cold-blooded murderer or the one she killed deserved it.

“If you know she has a record, then why did you recruit her?” I said playfully to Yuan Rang as I put down my brush.

“Eh, don’t kid with me Meng De,” Yuan Rang said with an irritated look. Looks like she understands how I think after being with me for a while now, “Others may not know, but I do know that Meng De would not have come this far if you were someone who cares about such trifles.”

Haa. I nearly laughed out loud but I was able to stop myself in time.

I didn't think my thoughts were so easy to read. As expected of Yuan Rang, if only Miao Cai has even a thousandth of that intuition of yours.

"Then, you're planning to..."

I and Yuan Rang looked at her, who detected our gazes and looked up to meet our eyes.

"Seeing how she's like, I think she was born to be an expendable warrior." Yuan Rang commented as she rubbed her chin with gleaming eyes. It was rare for the very discerning Yuan Rang to be so taken with someone.

(TL: Raw mentions 死士 which is a type of warrior used for especially dangerous missions. One example would be the famous Jing Ke who failed in the assassination of the Qin Shi Huang. Think Schwarzesmarken or Suicide Squad or Kamikaze.)

But.

"No it would be too wasteful to have her be an expendable warrior." I said to Yuan Rang as I shook my head. "She is perfect material for a general."

Of course, she will have to be trained. At the very least, she will have to change that wooden look of hers.

I stepped out from behind my table and made my way towards Dian Wei. When she saw me walking over, she swiftly got up and awaited my words.

From up close, I can see that there still remains a glimmer of radiance in Dian Wei's eyes. And soon after, this radiance should fill her eyes.

As I thought so, I stretched out my hand towards Dian Wei.

"Join me."

"Ah," I moaned softly and struggled to open my eyes.

Was I dreaming?

I have the feeling that I was dreaming of something that happened in the past but I can't remember what it was.

I looked out of the window and saw that the last remnants of sunlight from before had long since disappeared.

My head felt swollen and my vision was still blurry. This feeling was like the time when I did administrative work for 15 days consecutively. When I think about that time, it really is horrible.

I rubbed my forehead lightly before frowning.

What happened to me?

Aiya! I really can't remember at all, could it be that I passed out from doing administrative work again? Or did I go overboard with wine?

"You've awoken my lord." Cheng Yu's voice came from below the bed.

Can't she start a conversation from somewhere more normal?

"... Ah, yes I have." I lightly tapped the boards with my other hand, "Can you tell me why I'm lying here?"

"..." Cheng Yu paused again. That does not bode well, "Lord Hua Tuo said that you got too agitated and have too much on your mind so you fainted—"

"I asked for the reason." I interjected her non-answer as I tapped the boards once more, "Exactly what is it that led to me lying here..."

"General Dian Wei has passed away." Before I could finish, Cheng Yu interrupted me and my hands which were about to tap the boards again stopped in mid-air.

It felt like time itself stood still.

Dian Wei was dead.

That sound reverberated between my ears over and over. Even though my mind was usually quick, it was now motionless and I was unable to understand what those words meant.

Gradually, the words on the silk letter delivered this morning came to my mind.

[Yesterday, General Zhang Xiu who had previously surrendered launched an attack at night. Colonel Dian Wei died from an arrow in the chaos. Zhang Xiu surrendered again the next day and our army is currently returning to Xuchang.]

Dian Wei is dead, from an arrow.

As the scene of my reading the silk floated up in my mind, I finally understood

the meaning of those words.

“... Is that so,” I muttered under my breath. My vision was now clear, but I still could not see, “Dian Wei is gone huh.”

“Un, Dian Wei has passed away. She died on the battlefield.” Cheng Yu’s voice was unbelievably calm but I can’t see her face so I don’t know if her expression matches her voice, “And Zhang Xiu has been detained and will be brought to Xuchang soon. She will be here by tomorrow so when the time comes, please don’t be too...”

“I know, I will act accordingly.” I raised my volume, though I know that these words were more for myself than her, “If there’s nothing else, you can rest for the night.”

Cheng Yu did not reply, but she should have left already.

But that’s just what I’m hoping for as I have not checked below the bed. If she’s still here, then it will reflect poorly on me if she sees how terrible I’m looking now.

The next day when I heard that Zhang Xiu was now in Xuchang, I got prepared as soon as I awoke and hurriedly got into a carriage as I headed to the prison to see her.

Feng Xiao came along with me as well.

“How does my lord poan to deal with Zhang Xiu?” Feng Xiao looked ahead with glazed over eyes as she sat on my left, “Are you going to kill her?”

“What do you think?”

“You should kill her. Dian Wei is dead and anything less than Zhang Xiu’s death will not appease the other generals.” Feng Xiao said as she continued to look ahead and rested her head on the window, looking like she was about to sleep.

It was still early in the morning and the sun had barely begun to rise. Most of the residents of the city were still asleep and there were few on the streets. Feng Xiao has a weak constitution to begin with so her tiredness is understandable.

“Is that really what you think?” I smiled thinly as I flipped the question back on Feng Xiao.

“What does my lord mean?” Feng Xiao’s neck bent down the other way and leaned on my shoulder.

“Zhang Xiu cannot be killed.” I said as I calmly shut my eyes, “I will definitely face Ben Chu on the battlefield eventually. Zhang Xiu has a large army and ample supplies. Both I and Ben Chu need her. Now that she is here, I cannot let go of this opportunity.”

After I finished, Feng Xiao gave a wry smile. “So cold-blooded, my lord.”

“I’m just saying the correct answer you are looking for.” I said as I supported my chin with my hand and looked outside the window in a daze.

Xuchang was typically a bustling city but it was very quiet at this time. Almost as if it were mourning Dian Wei.

I wanted to give Dian Wei a grand funeral but this was not possible. Though Dian Wei was a general, her rank was only that of a Colonel.

(TL: It’s just like in present times. Military rank and appointment differs. Though their rank may be low, junior officers may get prestigious appointments.)

Her rank was too low and I will be unable to give her a funeral befitting of a general. If I do it anyway, I will likely be the subject of scorn and gossip in the Imperial Court.

And being the subject of gossip and scorn is extremely troublesome.

(TL: You might think this is ridiculous. But Cao Cao is essentially ruling by “fear” – If she loses that fear, she will lose control of the Imperial Court. Apart from a strong core of loyalists, most of the officials are not loyal to Cao Cao.)

The carriage master gave the order to the horse and the carriage stopped. The journey from my mansion to the prison is not a short one, but this particular trip seems to be the fastest.

“My lord, you must always remember,” Just as I was about to alight, Feng Xiao called out to me softly, “You are the lord.”

“...” I only replied her with a smile. I’d understood the logic behind this reasoning ever since I began raising an army in Chen Liu after all.

Feng Xiao did not alight with me, and she remained sitting quietly on the

carriage. As she was looking out of the window, I could not see what her expression is like now.

“Let go of me!”

Just as I alighted, Xu Chu’s delicate wail rang out. The prison was very large but it was clear that her voice came from inside.

An ominous feeling surged in my heart as I hurriedly walked in with 2 attendants.

“Oi! Xu Chu, what do you think you’re doing?!” The moment I walked in, I saw the furious figure of Xu Chu as expected. She held a large axe in her hands and was charging at Zhang Xiu. It was a good thing that Yuan Rang and Miao Cai were there to stop her, and they held her back as she slashed about violently, leaving deep cuts in the stone walls but unable to reach Zhang Xiu.

“Hu Chi!”

“Ah! My lord... My lord!” She only realised I was here when I called her by her courtesy name and she flung aside Yuan Rang and Miao Cai before running to me. Her face had already become a mess from crying, “Please, please avenge xiao E! Kill Zhang Xiu for me!”

“...” She tugged at my sleeve and had a look of such sheer, utter despair that I couldn’t even muster a smile.

“Why... Why did she have to die?” Xu Chu hung her head low as she sank to her knees and muttered tearfully, “I successfully finished the mission of protecting our lord and was hoping to be praised by xiao E. Even though I tried so hard... But... Why...”

“... I understand how you feel,” I rubbed Hu Chi’s forehead delicately, “But this is a time of war and chaos, death is commonplace.”

“But why did it have to be xiao E! Why wasn’t it this despicable Zhang Xiu instead!” She roared out in such a sonorous voice that my heart trembled with my ears and I couldn’t help but to frown. I looked over at Yuan Rang and Miao Cai and saw that they did not dare look over here and hung their heads low as they clenched their teeth.

I looked over to Zhang Xiu who was sitting on the side. She was sitting calmly in a seiza position. But that's to be expected as she has no reason to feel guilt after all.

"... I understand what everyone thinks." I adjusted my feelings and delivered the decision I intended to make from the very beginning, "But Zhang Xiu cannot be killed. Not now at least."

"My lord!"

"Hu Chi, don't say anymore..." I shrugged off Hu Chi's hands and turned around before continuing in a calmer and more level voice, "I am adamant on this. Don't... Ah, don't bring this up again."

As I said so, I clenched my teeth as I walked briskly out of the prison, ignoring the pleas to stay from the 3 behind me.

I hate myself. Because I still couldn't hold back from choking on the words I just said.

To avoid being laughed at by Feng Xiao, I decided to walk back to my mansion since it was still not dark out.

"Ah... I forgot to speak with Zhang Xiu." When I reached my room, I tapped my head as I remembered the business I forgot to attend to. I shook my head and sat down on my bed.

It's because of things like this that I'm unwilling to get too close with everyone. It gets in the way of doing things.

Dong Dong Dong 3 knocks sounded on the door.

Who could it be at this time?

"Enter." I tidied up my clothing and opened my eyes at the figure who just entered, "Un? It's Xu Huang huh."

(TL: New character, has an illustration.)

"My lord, I have returned." She walked over as she said so and took out a letter, "Here."

"Un? Thi is..." I received the letter with my hands as I inquired her.

“It’s Dian Wei’s personal combat report.”

My hands stiffened for a moment before taking the letter.

“Is that so...” I looked at the silk in my hands and could see that the writing was indeed that of Dian Wei’s.

She didn’t know how to write at first but she worked hard, and her writings seemed to have improved tremendously recently.

I felt sorrowful once more as I thought of this.

“I’ll be excusing myself.” Xu Huang said and bowed before exiting my room.

If it’s one good thing about Xu Huang, it’s that she never asks, hears or does what she doesn’t need to. This, and her tactfulness, are unique qualities amongst all my warrior generals.

Only after she left did I began to read the silk tissue.

Dian Wei began the report directly about the campaign and the goings-on. I’d thought that the long report would be entirely about military affairs but from the second page, the content became something like that from a diary.

[On the campaign, I’ll stop here for now. For some reason, I have an awful lot of things that I would usually be hesitant to tell my lord which I want to communicate here.

Please allow me to share some of my personal thoughts here today.

I don’t know if my lord knows, but I killed a local squire and I joined the army thereafter when I left my village. I’d wanted to accomplish something for myself then but I didn’t expect that the world had become so thoroughly chaotic and rotten.

Those with talent are unable to serve while those without hold the reins of power. I don’t dare to think too much of myself, but I wish to contribute and, at the very least, see the Central Plains become peaceful once more.

I’d sunk into despair and arrived at the conclusion that perhaps dying on the battlefield wouldn’t be such a bad thing.

And it was then that I came to serve you, my lord, under the recommendation

of General Xiahou Dun.

Does my lord still remember? What happened when I first came to your tent.

It's shameful to say this but I'm not too smart and so I can't really remember what happened then. Only the hand which my lord reached out to me, for which I am eternally grateful, is something I will always remember.

In that instant, I knew. That my lord had grasped my destiny. And I also believe that my lord can definitely change the world.

Just like how my lord changed me.

And though my lord never mentions it, I still believe my lord is pushing yourself too hard. My lord takes on everything and keeps it to yourself. Though my lord has emerged victorious time after time, it truly pains me to see your weak smile.

Perhaps, my lord should rely on us a little more. What we may be able to do may be limited, but at the very least, we can share your worries. I'm bad with words and I'm not very smart but I can listen to your complaints at least.

I am, after all, your E Lai.

Aiya, I'm starting to run out of things to write. I'll be stopping here for now then.

As for the rest, I'll be looking forward to speaking with you in person when I return to Xuchang.]

She signed off the letter not with Dian Wei, but with E Lai.

That was all there was to the letter, and I read it from beginning to end once more before folding the silk tissue.

"E Lai oh E Lai, your words are really untimely huh..." I laughed with a sigh as I looked at the silk tissue.

— My lord, though I've left Zhong Kang behind, please be extra careful in this period when I'm not around.

Just then, I recalled the last words Dian Wei left me with.

"... Cheng Yu? Xun Yu?" I called out twice, and only felt assured after nobody answered.

And finally, I cried.

(TL: In the original, Dian Wei killed a squire who laid his hands on a friend/brother's wife while in actual history, he killed a rival of the family he held allegiance to.)

(TL: In the original, Cao Cao invaded Zhang Xiu's territory personally along with Dian Wei. Zhang Xiu surrendered immediately and there was a banquet held which was when Zhang Xiu rebelled. Dian Wei held off Zhang Xiu and the troops who mutinied while Cao Cao retreated. Naturally it was an epic battle, even in the actual historical version, much like musou mode of Dynasty Warriors.)

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Afterword

Feels like it's about one volume's worth of chapters already so I'll stop here for now and write an afterword as a break.

Looking back, it's already the third volume. My head and hands have been sponning about and it hasn't been easy writing the third volume. I'm also now in the latter half of my senior year in high school so when the fourth volume will be out is a big question.

I only hope I can finish this work in my lifetime.

I went into a bit more detail in my descriptions this volume. Not sure if everyone is used to it. In any case, this volume is essentially Yuan Shu's chapter which ends with the slaying of Che Zhou and the death of E Lai. Now that Yuan Shu's story is more or less done, the fourth volume should be close to the Battle of Guandu.

Because the scale is rather large, I'm still thinking about how I want to write that scene. And also what sort of differences in my "true history" I should be writing.

By the way E Lai is dead, un. Should be dead.

(TL: She really is dead.)

As for this volume's extra story, as I mentioned on my wall, I will be writing it slowly. I did not pick a good topic and so it will probably end up being a lengthy story.

(TL: Lengthy is an understatement, it's 47 chapters long and is frankly quite boring. I'd rather translate other special chapters than that. But for now, I'll be moving on to translating volume 4.)

But don't worry. Even if I update more slowly, I won't skimp on length.

In any case, this should be it for the afterword. Thanks to Z-kun for the illustrations. Thanks also to 主管, 性羽, 羊猫 for their guidance. I still have a long way to go but I think I know where to go from here now.

Please do support me if you can, and drop some votes.

And so with “I wonder how many readers are still reading this?” in mind, I made a vote as something to comfort myself somewhat. Lastly, I hope to see more discussions, thoughts and reviews.

Thank you for your support.

Well then, see you all in the next afterword.